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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

January 2002

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Cover: Swami Vivekananda's Temple at Belur Math

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 107

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No. 1

VEDIC PRAYERS



चरणं पवित्रं विततं पुराणं
येन पूतस्तरति दुष्कृतानि ।
तेन पवित्रेण शुद्धेन पूता
अतिपाप्मानमरातिं तरेम ॥
—*Taittiriya Āraṇyaka*, 10.11

Being purified by the holy, all-pervading, eternal presence of the effulgent Being,
the human being gets rid of evil. May we too go beyond the touch of sin,
our great enemy, being freed from impurity by that ever-holy Presence that purifies all.



यो देवोऽग्नौ योऽप्सु
यो विश्वं भुवनमाविवेश ।
य ओषधीषु वनस्पतिषु
तस्मै देवाय नमो नमः ॥
—*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 2.17

Repeated salutations to God who is in the fire, who is in the water,
who has pervaded the whole universe,
who is in the plants, and who is in the trees.

Adoration

EDITORIAL

Dakshineswar temple garden, the place hallowed by the spiritual practices and presence of Sri Ramakrishna; the Bhavatarini Kali temple, where he worshipped and had the vision of the Divine Mother; the Radhakanta temple and the twelve Siva temples; the room where he lived in God-absorption and enacted the divine drama—all these sacred spots are objects of adoration to countless devotees. Those who have studied Sri Ramakrishna's life know that he was a worshipper in the Kali temple there. But what a worship it was! A worship with a difference: he cried and wept for God, the divine fire raging in his heart consuming his very being, till the stone image revealed to him the Consciousness pervading it. He started communicating with his Divine Mother, and She with him. That marked the beginning of Sri Ramakrishna's divine play on earth—unceasing adoration and realization of God in one aspect or another, including those prescribed by non-Hindu faiths.

Then, it was adoration of God everywhere. Says Sri Ramakrishna: 'One day I was about to gather some flowers. They were everywhere on the trees. At once I had the vision of *Virāt*; it appeared that His worship was just over. The flowers looked like a bouquet placed on the head of the Deity. I could not pluck them.'¹ To him, all existence—including the manifest world—now stood permeated with Consciousness. In his own words, 'The universe is conscious on account of the Consciousness of God. Sometimes I find that Consciousness wriggles about, as it were, even in small fish. ... Sometimes I find that the universe is saturated with the Consciousness of

God, as the earth is soaked with water in the rainy season.'² Sri Ramakrishna's adoration was that of a knower of God, and may be considered the ideal. A spiritual aspirant, however, passes through different levels of adoration.

Adoration at different levels

The way a spiritual aspirant adores God depends upon his attitude towards himself. In other words, his level of consciousness determines his conception and adoration of God. In his spiritual journey a spiritual aspirant undergoes changes in his attitude to God corresponding to the different degrees of purity of his mind, and finally reaches the culmination of spiritual life: oneness with God. A verse attributed to Hanuman brilliantly describes this important spiritual principle: 'When I think of myself as a body, I am the servant and You are my Master; when I think of myself as a *jīvātman*, I am a part and You are the Whole. When I know I am the Spirit, I am Thou—this is my firm conviction!'³

Adoration at the physical level

Adoration means to love something deeply and with respect. Everyone in this world has something to adore. While most people adore the world and its enjoyments, there are a few who adore something different, something higher. As long as we feel that our body-mind complex—the empirical personality—is real, we see the external world as real and it occupies our whole being. When such a person prays to God, he does it mostly to be freed from some physical or mental af-

1. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1996), pp 687-8. [Hereafter, *Gospel*.]

2. *Gospel*, p. 260.

3. *Dehabuddhyā tu daso'smi
jīva-buddhyā tvadamśakah;
Ātmabuddhyā tvamevāham
iti me nīcitā matih.*

fliction, or for worldly prosperity: name, fame, power, and position. These, according to the *Gītā*, are two (*ārta* and *arthārthī*) of the four types of people who worship God.⁴ Such people adore God as a human being and even conceive of Him as married and having children, if that suits them!

Swami Vivekananda throws light on an important truth: the constitutional necessity for such people to worship God with a human form. He says, 'Suppose a cow were philosophical and had religion, it would have a cow universe, and a cow solution of the problem, and it would not be possible that it should see our God. Suppose cats became philosophers, they would see a cat universe and have a cat solution of the problem of the universe, and a cat ruling it.'⁵ The point to be noted is: As long as cats and cows are conscious of their cat or cow form, they are constitutionally obliged to think of a God with their respective forms. Even so with a human being. As long as one's identity with the body and the mind is strong, adoration of a human God alone is possible and just. For those who feel attracted to the world and its objects, religion can be only a form of 'sanctified shopkeeping'.⁶ But Sri Krishna considers even such worshippers as noble-hearted.⁷ For, after all, it is *God* whom they approach for their worldly wants instead of manipulating men and matter, depending on their puny ego.

It will be pertinent to examine the view of people who do not believe in worshipping God with a human form. Such people may be strongly attached to the world and to their own limited personality. Only adoration of a God with a human form is taboo for them! As long as they continue to adore their own body,

this attitude cannot hold water. They need to purify their mind and be free from their own body consciousness before trying to negate God with a human form. Says Swami Yatiswarananda, 'Before you apply the concept of formlessness and impersonality to God, apply it first to yourself. It is an important law that our concept of Reality depends upon our concept of ourselves. So in order to meditate on the formless God, we must consider ourselves to be formless. We must depersonalize ourselves before we try to depersonalize God'.⁸

Adoration at the mental level

The third type of people who adore God, according to Sri Krishna, is called *jijñāsu*—one who seeks to know. Know what? Answers to certain fundamental questions of life: What is the meaning of human existence? What is the nature of God? Is a human being only what he or she appears from outside or is there a higher dimension to his or her personality? A seeker is not satisfied with the world and the sense enjoyments it has to offer. He knows that such enjoyments only sap the vigour of the senses.⁹ Such a person turns to God, adores Him, and prays to Him seeking to know the secret and purpose of human existence.

Spiritual life may be said to begin at this stage. Such a seeker practises spiritual disciplines, studies the scriptures, cultivates holy company and struggles for the purification of the mind. Since worldly things do not charm him anymore, he does not adore them now as he used to in his unawakened state. He lives mostly in the mental and intellectual planes, and derives joy from a higher dimension of his personality. This joy arises from a level transcending his sensory system, and is born of self-control and devotion to his Ideal. When he adores God in an image, it is not the exter-

4. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 7.16.

5. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1992), Vol. 2, p. 155. [Hereafter, *Complete Works*.]

6. *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 92.

7. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 7.18.

8. Swami Yatiswarananda, *Meditation and Spiritual Life* (Bangalore: Ramakrishna Math, 1989), p. 422.

9. *sarvendriyāṇāṃ jarayanti tejah* —*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.1.26.

nal splendour that draws his attention, but the infinite purity, knowledge, bliss and strength of the Divine permeating the image. He wages a relentless war with his own mind, which is like controlling the wind¹⁰ or reversing the current of a river.¹¹ This marks the beginning of his adoration at the mental level. The more his own mind becomes pure, the more he realizes the infinite purity, holiness, knowledge, freedom and strength of the object of his adoration, which could be any holy form including an incarnation of God. His adoration now takes the form of a deep longing to be filled with these qualities.

Patanjali advocates meditation on the 'heart that has given up all attachment to sense objects'.¹² Commenting on this sutra, Swami Vivekananda says: 'Take some holy person, some great person whom you revere, some saint whom you know to be perfectly non-attached, and think of his heart. That heart has become non-attached, and meditate on that heart; it will calm the mind.'¹³

Students of Sri Ramakrishna's life cannot but be astounded at his blazing superhuman renunciation and purity. Such a one-pointed and tenacious mind, which didn't stop till it accomplished what it believed to be true, cannot but be an object of adoration by a seeker. Every other page in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* records his losing external consciousness and passing into samadhi, the highest superconscious experience. He had to struggle hard to bring his mind down to the empirical level so that he could talk to suffering humanity on spiritual life! Such was his great concern for the spiritually impoverished humanity that he prayed to the Divine Mother to bring his mind down a little from the experience of oneness with God, and not to make him a dry sadhu!¹⁴

A spiritual aspirant cannot but contrast

such an exalted mind of a Ramakrishna with his own fickle mind. The aspirant's restless mind is able to think of a divine idea maybe for just a few minutes during his attempts at meditation—that too with great struggle! What a contrast with the mind of a Ramakrishna that is steeped in God consciousness for all 24 hours even in the midst of an excruciating throat pain due to cancer!

The struggling aspirant adores such a superhuman mind and inherits its traits by and by. By opening himself to its purifying influence more and more, his mind gets cast in the mould of his chosen Ideal. He prays to Him 'to be endowed with humility, control of mind, freedom from thirst for sense objects, compassion for all beings, and to ferry him across the ocean of transmigratory existence'.¹⁵

Adoration of God through work

A proper attitude to work and to one's profession can convert work into a potent tool for effecting the purification of the mind. Sri Krishna emphasizes this in a series of graded disciplines for spiritual life: 'Fix your mind on Me, may your intellect dwell on Me. Undoubtedly, you will live in Me on giving up the body. In case you are not able to fix your mind on Me, desire to attain Me through *abhyāsa yoga* (the yoga of steadfast practice). If you are unable to do this either, be intent on working for My sake. Working for Me, you will attain perfection. If you cannot thus work for My sake resorting to yoga, renounce the fruits of all your actions, being self-controlled.'¹⁶

So, performing one's action with a view to pleasing God is a basic discipline every seeker is taught to practise. How is one to surrender the fruits of one's actions to God? By taking refuge in the 'primeval Puruṣa (God) from whom have originated activities from time immemorial!'¹⁷

Sri Krishna emphasizes the efficacy of adoration of God through one's work in the 18th chapter of the *Gītā*: 'From whom is the evolution of all beings, by whom is everything

10. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 6.34.

11. *pratisrotah pravartanamiva*, Sankara's commentary on the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 2.1.1.

12. *Vitarāgaviśayin vā cittam* —Yoga Sūtras, 1.37.

13. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 227.

14. *Gospel*, p. 388.

15. Sankaracharya, *Viṣṇuṣaṭpadi*, 1.

16. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 12.8-11.

17. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 15.4.

pervaded—by adoring Him through one's work, a human being achieves perfection.¹⁸

Service to fellow beings is another effective way of adoring God—service as the worship of the indwelling Spirit. This incidentally is the basic work philosophy of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Vivekananda stresses its importance in his celebrated lecture on 'True Worship' delivered in Rameswaram:

A rich man had a garden and two gardeners. One of these gardeners was very lazy and did not work; but when the owner came to the garden, the lazy man would get up and fold his arms and say, 'How beautiful is the face of my master', and dance before him. The other gardener would not talk much, but would work hard, and produce all sorts of fruits and vegetables which he would carry on his head to his master who lived a long way off. Of these two gardeners, which would be the more beloved of his master? Shiva is that master, and this world is His garden, and there are two sorts of gardeners here; the one who is lazy, hypocritical, and does nothing, only talking about Shiva's beautiful eyes and nose and other features; and the other, who is taking care of Shiva's children, all those that are poor and weak, all animals, and all His creation. Which of these would be the more beloved of Shiva? Certainly he that serves His children.¹⁹

Adoration at the spiritual level

When the spiritual aspirant is blessed with the knowledge of the Spirit, his life becomes an act of continuous worship. He now belongs to the fourth class of worshippers of God, the *jñānī*. As mentioned already, Sri Krishna calls all the four types of devotees noble-hearted. But, he considers a *jñānī* (man of knowledge) to be special among them because of his one-pointed devotion to Him. Such a devotee is dear to God and so is God to such a devotee.²⁰ Commenting on this verse, Sri Sankara says that a *jñānī* adores God alone be-

cause he fails to see anything else adorable!²¹ The adoration of the *jñānī* can therefore be called the adoration of the Spirit by the Spirit.

Lives of saints and sages illustrate this supreme adoration of the Spirit by the Spirit, which Swami Vivekananda considered 'true religion'.²² Says he: 'Throw away all matter! The conception of God must be truly spiritual. All the different ideas of God, which are more or less materialistic, must go. As man becomes more and more spiritual, he has to throw off all these ideas and leave them behind. As a matter of fact, in every country there have always been a few who have been strong enough to throw away all matter and stand out in the shining light, worshipping the spirit by the spirit.'²³

Sri Ramana Maharshi was a great saint who lived in the last century and propagated the *vicāra mārga* (the path of knowledge and discrimination). An incident happened when he was 12 and living with his uncle in Madurai. One day, as he lay on the floor, he began to think he was dead. He imagined that his body was carried to the cremation ground, kept on the funeral pyre and set on fire. He experienced that still *he* did not die, that the Atman in him continued to exist even after the body was consigned to flames. This was not a mere thought but a tangible spiritual experience. For, when he went to Tiruvannamalai—where he remained for the rest of his mortal life—he was known to be absorbed in his inner Self in a cave where even the sun's rays could not penetrate. Worms and vermin used to feed on his limbs, about which he was not at all conscious. Abidance in the Self became his natural state—*sahaja samadhi*.

After this abiding spiritual experience, Sri Ramana Maharshi's visits to the Siva temple in Madurai acquired a new meaning. He

18. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 18.46.

19. *Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 142.

20. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 7.17.

21. *anyasya bhajanīyasya adarśanāt*, Sankara's commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, 7.17.

22. *Complete Works*, Vol. 8, p. 141.

23. *Complete Works*, Vol. 8, p. 139.

would stand in silent adoration before the stone images of the 63 Nayanmars—Saiva saints of Tamil Nadu. Tears of *bhakti* would stream down his cheeks as this *jñāni* stood in amazement at their devotion!

One day at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna entered one of the Siva temples, and started reciting the famous hymn *Śivamahimna Stotram* describing the glory of Siva. When he came to the following verse, he was overwhelmed with emotion: 'If the black mountain were to be the ink, the ocean the inkpot, the best branch of the celestial tree the pen, and the earth the paper—with all these instruments if the Goddess of Wisdom Herself were to write for eternity, even then, O Lord, She cannot exhaust Your glories!' He then exclaimed aloud again and again: 'O Great God, how can I express Your glory?' Tears started flowing profusely from his eyes. He lost himself in the infinite Consciousness of Siva.²⁴

Immersed in God consciousness, such a man of supreme Knowledge lives oblivious of

his body, mind and ego. This state marks the acme of all adoration—the Spirit of the devotee finds its oneness with the supreme Spirit. The river merges into the sea.²⁵

This Special Number

This special number of *Prabuddha Bharata* focusses on adoration. It comprises articles from many scholars on Adoration in Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. There are also articles on the following themes: adoration through inter-religious understanding, song, hymns, work, music, art, management etc. We thank our contributors for their excellent articles, a result of years of study, meditation, and experience. □

24. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1970), p. 431.
25. The river of individual consciousness with name and form merging into the sea of universal Consciousness losing its individual identity. —*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 3.2.8.

The Ideal of Adoration

In worship of the gods, you must of course use images. But you can change these. Kali need not always be in one position. Encourage your girls to think of new ways of picturing Her. Have a hundred different conceptions of Saraswati. In the chapel ... if the maintenance of perpetual adoration could be organised, nothing could be more in accord with Hindu feeling. But the ceremonies employed must themselves be Vedic. ... Then there is the sacrifice of learning. That is the most beautiful of all. Do you know that every book is holy in India, not the Vedas alone, but the English and Mohammedan also? All are sacred. And never forget humanity! The idea of a humanitarian man-worship exists in nucleus in India, but it has never been sufficiently specialised. Let your students develop it.

—Swami Vivekananda

Adoration of the Universal Man in the Upanishads

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj is the president of the Ramakrishna Order. He is well known internationally as an ambassador of Vedanta. He has been tirelessly spreading the universal message of oneness and spirituality everywhere since over seven decades. He has also written many important books, of which The Message of the Upanishads and The Bhagavad Gītā (in three volumes) are very well known. The following article has been culled from The Message of the Upanishads (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan). We thank Swami Satyamayanandaji, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, for arranging this article.

The Theme of the Upanishads

Without understanding the Upanishads, it is impossible to get an insight into Indian history and culture. Every subsequent development of philosophy and religion in India has drawn heavily on them. The path of bhakti or devotion to a personal God, the path of karma or detached action, and the synthesis of all spiritual paths in a comprehensive spirituality, expounded in the *Gītā*, are all derived from the Upanishads. The Upanishads are thus the perennial springs of strength and creativity. Their theme is freedom of the human spirit and their message is of fearlessness and love and service. They summon men and women everywhere to this mighty adventure of freedom and fearlessness, love and service, and to the realization, by each man and woman, of his or her essential spiritual nature, and the transcendence of the limitations of finitude. They explain every great movement—social, political, or religious—nay the phenomena of life itself, as an expression of the urge to freedom inherent in every organism—the struggle of the Infinite caught up in the cell or in a body.

Human Excellence

India asked, ages ago, 'What is the highest excellence of man?' This question was tackled with a thoroughness that is very impres-

sive. Man, endowed with a body, with the senses, with various capacities, has yet to rise to the point of his highest excellence, which he has in a small measure even in his very childhood. The achievement of this highest excellence is the product of a converging life endeavour; it is education and religion in one. Man's supreme excellence, says the Upanishads, consists in transcending the limitations of his senses. We have transcended many things. We have transcended our animal ancestry to some extent in this human psycho-physical organism, but this is not the last nor the highest achievement. Even man's technical achievements up to date do not touch a fringe of his total possibilities; in spite of these intellectual developments, he has still about him and in him much of the primeval evolutionary slime; he has to shed much of his animal ancestry. He represents a great advance in evolution, but evolution has still greater heights to scale in him and through him. The Upanishads took up this challenge, the challenge of deeper levels of human experience. This is the theme of the Upanishads.

The True Nature of Man

What then is this eternal glory of man? It is the inborn divine nature, birthless, deathless, pure and holy. Man is not the body, nor the senses; these are but the instruments of

manifestation and action in the spatio-temporal world of the Atman. It is limitless and one, yet expressing itself through the little finite forms of body and mind. This is the true nature of man. This is not a mere philosophical concept but a realized fact. All sensitive minds are inspired by these ideas. They inspired people when the Upanishads were composed; they inspired people a thousand years later; and today, after 3000 to 4000 years, they still inspire us. Neither the phenomenal progress of science and technology, nor the wealth and power of modern world has been able to reduce their relevance of these ideas. They have only increased it. The world today is seeking for precisely this spiritual growth for man; it is the only means of breaking through the stagnation that has come upon the human mind. 'The human mind has lost its bearings in the delusion of wealth and power, *pramādyantam vīttamohena mūḍham*' (*Katha Upanishad*). Continued stagnation means death. So the Upanishads give us their gospel of hope for man through their grand theme: Man shall have wealth; man shall have power; man shall have all this; but he shall not get lost in any one of these. These are the means, not the end; he shall break through the crust of experience and realize the Atman, his divine Self which is Sat - Chit - Ānanda, Existence - Knowledge-Bliss. Thus do the Upanishads show us the way to creative living and fulfilment.

Dynamic Creativity

Creative living is a beautiful term. What is creativity? Merely doing the same things over and over again does not indicate creativity. The body, the senses, the nervous system, their recurring excitements and titillations do not make for creative living. Some time or another we have to break through the prison wall of body and mind. We have to reach true creativity, and it is this type of creativity that the Upanishads represent. Those who are modern fall into two categories. First, there are those who are modern simply because they use modern amenities. That is the ordinary meaning of the word modern. But there is an-

other meaning, a more profound meaning. In the second meaning the modern man is he who is nourished on the spirit of science, who is alert of mind, and on the tract of truth, who has the capacity to question. That man is modern who is inquisitive, who has the passion for truth, who never takes things for granted, but always strives to get into the heart of things. Such a modern mind is the mind closest to the spirit of the Upanishads. For in the Upanishads too there is this atmosphere of alertness, this mood of constant seeking, a deep passion for truth, a constant desire to forge ahead and not take things for granted in a complacent spirit. It is here that you find the close kinship between the Upanishads and the modern spirit. The spirit of inquiry which possessed the sages of the Upanishads led them to question experience, to question the environing world; it also led them to fearlessly question their gods and the tenets of their traditional faiths. They showed their uniqueness in contrast to other gifted people of the ancient world, namely, the Greeks, who did not experience the same urge to subject their religion to that rational investigation which they so diligently and passionately applied to social and political phenomena. The Upanishadic and earlier—even the Vedic—sages did not also fear to doubt when rational, certain knowledge was difficult to come by. They illustrate the creative role of skepticism; in the pursuit of truth, such skepticism is but a prelude to rational faith. When they sought for the truth of the external world, they found it difficult and baffling; inquiry only deepened the mystery. The *Nāsadiya-Sūkta* of the *Rig Veda* records the impact of this mystery on the ancient Indian mind. The mind discovered early, as modern thinkers are slowly discovering today, that the mystery of the external world will only deepen and not diminish, in spite of advancing knowledge, if the mystery of the inner world is not tackled.

The Knower and the Known

For a complete philosophy of Reality, there is need to have data from both the fields

of experience, the outer and the inner. Modern science has become aware of the influence of the datum of the observer on the knowledge of the observed data. If the Self as knower is inextricably involved in the knowledge of the not-Self, of the known, an inquiry into the nature of the Self and the nature of knowledge becomes not only a valid, but an indispensable and integral part of scientific investigation into the nature of Reality. The Upanishads, therefore, were far in advance of human thought when they decided to dedicate themselves to the tackling of the inner world. They not only gave a permanent orientation to Indian culture and thought, but also blazed a trail for all subsequent philosophy in the East and the West. They reveal an age characterized by a remarkable ferment, intellectual and spiritual. It was one of those rare ages in human history which have registered a distinct breakthrough in man's quest for truth and meaning, and which have held far-reaching consequences for all subsequent ages.

Spirituality is Man's Greatest Adventure

The Upanishads boldly proclaim that spirituality is the prerogative of every individual. This Atman, the divine, the immortal, is the Self of every man and woman and child. It is the true nature of man. It is also the true nature of all animals, but animals cannot realize it. The Upanishads tell us that wealth and power are not the highest glory of man. They do not condemn man's pursuit of worldly wealth and power; they never condemn any values pursued by man. They only say, 'there is something better and higher than these.' The Upanishads ever urge us to go on to the realization of this something better within us. Sri Ramakrishna, in one of his parables, tells the story of a woodcutter who, going into the forest to cut wood, was told by a holy man to go forward. Following this advice, in due course the woodcutter came across, first, a

sandalwood forest, then, a silver mine, then, a gold mine, and, going deeper still into the forest, he found at last a diamond mine, and became exceedingly rich.

Transcending the Ego

The Upanishads summon man to a constant struggle to gain the highest, the struggle to achieve the eternal, the permanent, the immortal imbedded in life and experience. Other races and cultures have spoken of man as a dominator of external nature, as a creator of values in the context of man's collective life. In Greek thought, for example, we have the concept of the Promethean spirit, the power of the human spirit to overcome external obstacles and establish man's supremacy over the forces of nature and, if necessary, over the forces of other human beings as well. The great defect in this line of thought, when pursued by itself, is that it does not carry all humanity together. It is based on the concept of man's dominating everything external to himself; it does not stress the need to chasten and overcome the ego, which results from such domination of his external environment. Man dominating his external environment is a valid concept; it is a form of human excellence. The West has carried it to the highest level of expression. But this is not the highest that man is capable of. Indian thought will not accord it the highest point in the scale of human excellence. That point involves the transcendence of the ego and the emergence of the universal within man. When man achieves the supreme self-transcendence he finds that there is nobody to dominate. He finds that he is one with all, for he has realized the Self in all. In other words, he discovers himself as the Universal Man, integrated within and without, and himself pulsating in the heart of man and nature. This liberation of the Universal Man out of the common men and women that we are is the theme of the Upanishads. □

'The Upanishads point out that the goal of man is neither misery nor happiness, but we have to be masters of that out of which these are manufactured,' says *Swami Vivekananda*.

Vedic Adoration

Swami Vivekananda says that 'there are scholars who from the ancient Aryan literature show that religion originated in nature worship.' But he rejects this idea and says that 'in the oldest records there is no trace of it whatsoever.' He adds that there was a difference between the nature worship of other races and that of the Indian Aryans. What was the Vedic Aryan nature worship like? 'I propose to call it the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses,' says Swamiji (The Complete Works, Vol. 2, pp. 58-9). A former editor of Prabuddha Bharata has attempted a cursory introduction to the study of Vedic adoration in this article.

Vedic adoration is an absorbing topic for study and emulation. Centuries before the Puranic ideal of image worship became widespread (though elements of image worship were always there since the very beginning of Vedic civilization), the Vedic sages adored the Supreme in several nonpareil ways. A small introduction to the most ancient systems of Vedic adoration has been attempted here.

How old are the Vedas? In his two-volume work, *Indian Philosophy*, Dr S. Radhakrishnan makes a beautiful remark:

Some Indian scholars assign the Vedic hymns to 3000 BC, others to 6000 BC. ... Jacobi puts the hymns at 4500 BC. We assign them to the fifteenth century BC and trust that our date will not be challenged as being too early.¹

The adoration of the Vedic Aryans may be divided into five broad divisions: (a) nature worship; (b) worship through fire sacrifices, (c) worship of the Self, (d) worship of elders, and (e) worship of the Vedas themselves.

Nature Worship

The aborigine nature worship was with the idea that

there is a high god as the lord in heaven who has withdrawn from the immediate details of the governing of the world. This kind of high god—the *Deus otiosus*, hidden, or idle, god—is one who has delegated all work on earth to

what are called 'nature spirits,' which are the forces or personifications of the forces of nature. High gods exist, for example, in such indigenous religions on Africa's west coast as that of the Dyola of Guinea. In such religions the spiritual environment of man is functionally structured by means of personified natural powers, or nature spirits.²

Nature worship of the Vedic Aryans was, unlike that of such other civilizations, the veneration of the Divine through some natural manifestations. Indian Aryans were a very highly civilized race. Their worship originated in the knowledge that God is immanent in nature, *is* nature, and also transcends it. It was not the idea that nature is an independent entity like God and the world that prompted Vedic sages to adore it. Neither was it the Sāṃkhyan idea of nature being an independent entity, responsible for creation. It was not pantheism either. Pantheism is just the reverse—it's equating God with the forces of nature. Vedic nature worship, on the other hand, was the seeing of God Himself in nature. While in the former the forces of nature were more important, in the latter it was God who was most important.

How did the Vedic sages view nature? The vision of the Vedic seers was arresting and beautiful. In a glorious mantra, the Vedic sages sing:

Madhu vātā ṛtāyate

1. Dr S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), Vol. 1, p. 67. [Hereafter, *Indian Philosophy*.]

2. *Britannica* 2001 Deluxe CD-ROM edition.



The Vedic world, a panorama

*madhu-kṣaranti sindhavaḥ.
Mādhvīrṇaḥ santvoṣadhiḥ.
Madhu naktam-utoṣasi
madhumat pārthivam rajah.
Madhu-dyaurastu naḥ pitā.
Madhumān-no vanaspatir-
madhumām-astu sūryaḥ.
Mādhvīr-gāvo bhavantu naḥ.*

The air, the waters, the plants and herbs, the night and day, the very dust of the earth, the heavens, the trees, the sun, the cows, in fact, everything exudes nectar; may everything bring everlasting bliss to us.

In this *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (10.39) mantra, *madhu* stands for immortality. Whatever the sages saw, that they conceived as bringing the sweetness of immortality. Therefore Indian adoration of nature has been consistently mystical, and is based on the concept of the oneness of Reality behind the multifarious manifestations. '*Ekam sat*, the One is real.'

That the Vedic vision of the universe is spiritual is evident from the first section of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, which speaks of the three *vyāhṛtis* (*bhūh*, *bhuvah*, and *svah*), and says that there is a fourth, which is Brahman (Reality). Brahman is behind everything, ie, *is* everything. Again, what is in the external nature is also present within us, says this Upaniṣad, and compares the *vyāhṛtis* of the macrocosm

with those of the microcosm. This is the grand Vedic way of looking at things.

From the very beginning, the Vedic Aryans asked questions in a compelling manner, like a scientist does. They asked, for instance: Why does the wind blow? Why does the sun glow? Why do rivers flow? Though they might have initially thought that

these forces themselves had the power to perform actions, they soon realized that there were powers behind everything, which they saw as the one supreme Truth, that made everything act. This led them to adore those powers, which they identified as the gods. But their vision was henotheistic; they knew fully well that these gods were only symbolic representations of the supreme Being. Max Mueller has remarked that Vedic pantheism is not pantheism but henotheism, which is the adoration of each deity, considering it as the Supreme.³

What was the nature of this nature worship? The sages sang hymns in praise of the deities, prayed to them, and offered oblations to them. Initially they sought wealth, health, progeny, protection, rains, destruction of enemies, etc. Were they so simple to seek favours from nature? Not at all, as we shall see now.

In the *R̥g Veda*, about 30 sages sing 1,028 hymns containing 10,552 mantras to the supreme Being, seeing Him manifested as various deities like Agni, Vāyu, Aditi, Brahmanaspati, Soma, Uṣā, Prthvī, Viṣṇu, etc. They pray to Mother Earth, for instance: '*Syenā prthvī bharā-nṛkṣarā niveśinī; yacchā naḥ*

3. *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1, pp. 90-1.

śarma saprathaḥ, O vast Mother Earth! May you become favourable and free from obstacles; may you bestow immense happiness on us.⁴ They pray to the sun, calling him Lord Savitā, to bring rains: 'Apāni napātam-avase savitāram upastuhi; tasya vratānyuśmasi, We adore the rain-giver Savitā for protection; may he make our life's sacrifice easy to perform.'⁵



Two Vedic sages 'churning' wood to make fire

The sages pray to the trees and herbs, seeking protection: 'Uttānaparṇe subhage devajūte sahasvati..., O Mother Tree, your leaves are facing higher regions, you have been created by the Supreme; your brilliance is incomparable; you become medicine for my health; please protect me' (Ṛg Veda, 10.145.2). They see the mountains and extol their majesty: 'Girayaścini jihate parśānāso manyamānāḥ; parvatāścinni yemire, Ah! See those mountains! Even though they are tortured and troubled, they won't give up their positions' (Ṛg Veda, 8.7.34). The sages knew the science of rainfall, for example, and so they prayed to the sun instead of the rivers to bring rains. Sage Dirghatamā says, for instance:

*Kṣṇaṁ niyānaṁ havayaḥ suparṇā
āpo vasānā vidam-utpatanti;
Ta āvavrtran-ṛtsadanāḍṛta-syāt
idaḥhūtena pṛthivī vyudyate.*

The beautiful rays of the sun, for which the water vapour is food, are filling the dark-coloured clouds with more water and taking them towards higher worlds. When they choose a place where they can pour, they come down again and fill the earth with their life-giving waters.⁶

When the sages pray to the rivers, they view them as standing for something else, something higher. Sage Viśvāmītra's son, Madhucchanda, prays to the River Sarasvatī: 'Maho arṇaḥ sarasvatī pracetayati ketunā; dhiyo

viśvā virājati, Sarasvatī is overflowing and has brought a lot of water; she is awakening our intellect, and bringing us the knowledge of everything.'⁷ So water is not just water; it's a great medicine. A sage of the Ṛg Veda (1.23.19) says: 'apsvantar-amṛtam-apsu-bheṣajam, water is nectar, water is medicine.' The sages therefore prayed to the gods to keep all the rivers full so that 'duhitur-vakṣaṇāsu rūpā mināno akṛṇot, the daughter of the Lord, earth, should remain beautiful always' (Ṛg Veda, 5.42.13).

This shows that the Vedic sages were scientists of distinction and not ignorant worshippers of the forces of nature. Moreover, these scientists, who viewed their inventions with a mystical eye, were also poets. A female sage (called Aditi) is perhaps one of the greatest of such poets. She sings (Ṛg Veda, 4.18.6):

*Etā arṣanti-alaḥ bhavanti
ṛtāvaririva saṁkrośamānāḥ;
Etā vi pṛccha kimidaṁ bhaṇanti
kamāpo adriṁ paridhīm rujanti.*

The rivers are flowing blissfully, singing 'ala-lā'. O Sage! Please ask them what they intend to say. How at all do these sweet, soft waters overcome huge obstacles like mountains!

Further, this female sage imagines that the rivers are perhaps reciting some mantras in praise of her dear son, Indra! We see Sage Viśvāmītra singing in a poetic way: 'Samudreṇa sindhavo yādāmānā indrāya somaṁ

4. Ṛg Veda, 1.22.15.

5. Ṛg Veda, 1.22.6.

6. Ṛg Veda, 1.164.47.

7. Ṛg Veda, 1.3.12.

suṣutariḥ bharantaḥ, Just as the beautiful rivers, desirous of union with the ocean, go towards him to make him full, so do the priests fill the cups meant for Indra with the soma juice.⁸

Sage Śyābāśva sings like the poet Kālidāsa of *Meghasandēśa* fame: '*Etariḥ me stomamūrmye dārbbhyāya parā vaha; giro devi rathiriva*, O Goddess of Night (*rātri*)! Will you please carry my hymns addressed to the sons of Marut over to them? O Goddess! Just as a charioteer carries so many things in his chariot, please carry my hymns to the Maruts.'⁹

Our Vedic poets weren't just poets, they were basically illumined souls. A *kavi* is *krāntadarśi*, a seer ('*kavikratuḥ*, the poet sees beyond'—*Ṛg Veda*, 9.9.1). To him, therefore, even insignificant things are Divine. Even the grinding stone using which the sages crushed the soma plant was divine! At least one hymn containing about 18 mantras has been dedicated to the grinding stone. This stone is praised in so many ways: its sound is sweet, its movements are sweet, everything is sweet. The sages feel that the sound of the grinding stone is like the snorts of the cows and bulls when they are extremely happy to eat new foliage from the trees. 'Listening to their noise, I feel as if the birds in the air are chirping, the black-spotted deer are dancing in the forest while grazing.'¹⁰ 'O grinding stones! You yourselves don't break, but break others. You don't have the idea of tiredness, you don't know laxity, you don't know death, you don't know disease or old age or thirst or anger or hatred; you are hard, but you are experts in the arts of going up and coming down.'¹¹

The hymns that the sages sing in praise of light, dawn, etc are all thrilling. Uṣā, the goddess of dawn, has been praised in a number of ways by the sages because she is the first deity who dispels darkness:

*Pratyū adarśyātyatyūtacchanti
duhitā divaḥ;*

8. *Ṛg Veda*, 3.36.7.

9. *Ṛg Veda*, 5.61.17.

10. *Ṛg Veda*, 10.94.5.

11. *Ṛg Veda*, 10.94.11.

Apo mahi vṛṇute cakṣuṣā

tamo jyotiṣkrṇoti sūnari.

The daughter of the higher worlds has arrived and is dispelling darkness. She has shown herself to everyone. With her light of knowledge, Uṣā is dispelling the darkness of ignorance, and is spreading light everywhere. She will embrace the vast expanse of water now.¹²

Again,

Ah! Our darkness is going to end now. Uṣā is making all living beings conscious. Uṣā is smiling at us; she is about to bring us supreme happiness.¹³

For a race which sees everything as Divine itself, and as showering nectar, it's a life full of bliss and happiness only.

Worship through Fire Sacrifices

The first portion of the Vedas is called the *mantra* or *saṁhitā* or the hymn portion. The greater part of the Vedas are hymns. Apart from singing hymns and prayers, the sages also offered oblations. Thus came into existence the next portion of the Vedas, called the *brāhmaṇa* portion. In fact, *mantra* and *brāhmaṇa* put together is called the *Veda* (*mantra-brāhmaṇayor veda nāmadheyam*). The *brāhmaṇas* contain sacrificial details. A third portion (often included in the second) is called *āraṇyaka*, 'forest treatises'. The *āraṇyakas* deal with the rules of sacrifices, and give detailed descriptions of different sacrifices. The Vedas consider fire (Agni) as the mediator between the gods and human beings. Agni was considered to be the priest born of the Vedas (*jāta-veda*), the carrier of offerings, the giver of everything, and the friend of all.

Agnināgniḥ samidhyate

kavir-gr̥hapatir-yuvā;

Havyavād juhvāsyah.

Agni becomes alive through Agni. He is brilliant, the protector of the house, young, the carrier of offerings to the gods, and *juhumukha*, ie, he is the ghee poured from the ladle made of *juhu* wood.¹⁴

12. *Sāma Veda*, 'Aindra Kāṇḍa', 303.

13. *Ṛg Veda*, 1.92.6.

14. *Ṛg Veda*, 1.12.6.

Agni is also called 'the first of the Aṅgirās', 'the door to heaven', 'the father and mother', 'the stainless', 'the most favourable god', etc.¹⁵

The sages were aware that fire is hidden in the waters. The sage Viśvāmitra says: '*Apān napāta subhagam*, O Agni! You are hidden in the waters.' '*Kāyamāno vanā tvam*, you are a lover of the forest.' '*Yan-mātrī-ajagannapaḥ*, you become calm when you enter the mother-like waters.' '*Asu sinham-iva śritam*, you are hidden in the waters like a lion in the forest.'¹⁶

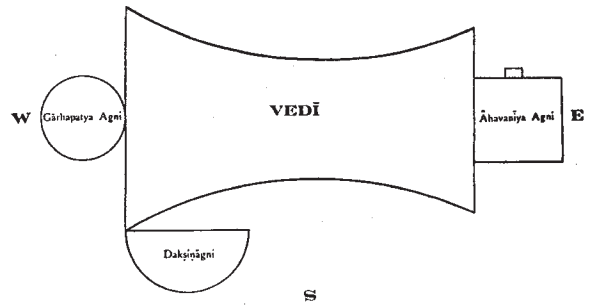
The Vedic sages praised, prayed, and protected Agni because he was their medium to seek favours from the gods. They performed many sacrifices like *agniṣṭoma*, *jyotiṣṭoma*, etc, seeking heavenly and earthly pleasures. Moreover, they wanted liberation, as Agni destroys sins, diseases, misery, etc. '*Agne naya supathā rāye asmān*, O Agni, take us along the noblest path' (*Ṛg Veda*, 1.189.1).

There are innumerable rules and regulations about how to perform sacrifices. The ladles, the spoons, the offerings, the *yajña-kunḍa* or seat of fire, the sacrificers like *adhvaryu*, *hotā*, *brahma*, etc are all perfectly defined. A separate science, a *vedāṅga*, called *jyotiṣa* was introduced to calculate the planetary effects.

In time, the Pūrva Mīmāṃsakas took up this idea of sacrifice from the Vedas, and began elaborate discussions about the causes and effects of sacrifices. '*Svargakāmo yajeta*, if you desire heaven, perform sacrifice,' was their fundamental dictum, and they called it a science. They forgot God behind the sacrifices, and made *yajña* a machine. If the sacrifice is done perfectly, without errors, the sacrificer is bound to attain what he wants, they said.

But the sages learned that what they were doing was not enough: there was something higher. So their way of looking at Agni

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A fire sacrifice plan: *agnyādhāna vēdī*

changed. They began to compare Agni with the power of speech (*vāk*). Going further still, they went deep within themselves. And this led them to the threshold of the Atman. They understood that the fire god or Agni was not outside, but within them. Agni within the body sought the offerings of all desires, ambitions, etc. By offering as oblations all their desires, the sages became free from attachments to the world and were able to see the light of the Self. So Agni was also a mediator between the knowledge of the Atman and the seeker. '*Sa hūyamāno amṛtāya matsva*, We adore you, O Agni, with a desire to become immortal.'¹⁷

Jaramāṇaḥ samidhyase

devebhyo havyavāhana;

Tvā havanta martyāḥ.

O human beings whose nature is to die one day! Agni is immortal. He is great and the master of the house. Worship him with offerings.¹⁸

What does Agni do when he is worshipped? He will destroy inner enemies, ie, the weaknesses in the soul, and make the worshipper ready for receiving the light of the Atman. This was how the sacrificial adoration developed in India. But it did not end there.

The Adoration of the Self

Dissatisfied with what all they had achieved, the sages of the Vedas went further to discover the ultimate truth of the universe. They discovered that Brahman alone was real

15. See *Ṛg Veda*, 1.31.1

16. *Ṛg Veda*, 3.9.1-7.

17. *Ṛg Veda*, 10.122.5.

18. *Ṛg Veda*, 10.118.6.



A sage offering oblations: Art by Swami Aptananda

and everything else was superimposition. The sages also saw that the individual Self was nothing but Brahman caged in the body owing to ignorance and its consequent superimposition. Each sage left records of his or her supreme experiences for the benefit of posterity. This was how the fourth portion of the Vedas, called the *upaniṣads*, came into being.

'*Sarvāśāṁ upaniṣadām ātma-yāthātmya nirūpaṇenaiva upakṣayāt*, all the *Upaniṣads* exhaust themselves in describing the true nature of the Atman,' says Śaṅkara (in his introduction to the *Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad*). The *Upaniṣads* deal with the true nature of the universe or *jagat* and the Reality behind. They also describe ways and means to know the Reality, by initiating the paths of knowledge (*jñāna*), yoga and devotion (*bhakti*). Through discussion about the Self, meditation, devotion, etc, one can overcome bondage, they affirm; for the only goal is to go from the unreal to Real, from

darkness to Light, and from death to Immortality: '*asato mā sadgamaya, tamaso mā jyotir-gamaya, mṛtyor-māmṛtaṁ gamaya*' (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1.4.1).

Thus begins the next part of the Vedic adoration: the adoration of the Self. How do the sages adore their innate Self? One method is symbolism. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* teaches us to think of the cosmos as a sacrificial horse and to learn to 'sacrifice for a greater sacrifice, *bhūyasya yajñena bhūyo yajeyeti*'.¹⁹ The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* teaches us to think of our personality as a chariot.²⁰ The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* teaches that we must think of life as the fruit of a *nyagrodha* tree²¹ or the salt doll,²² etc. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* also teaches, by way of the discussion between Sanatkumāra and Nārada, how to perform inner adoration.

Another method is the rejection of the unreal, 'for there is no path better than this; '*neti neti, na hyetad-asmāt iti*' (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 2.3.6). Yet another is the discussion about Reality.

There are famous discussions: between Yājñavalkya and Maitreyī, between Janaka and Yājñavalkya, between Ajātaśatru and Dipta-bālāki Gārgya, all in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, between Yama and Naciketa in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, etc. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* discussion between Nārada and Sanatkumāra, Nārada brings up Sanatkumāra's mind to the highest by asking him to adore speech, then mind, then will, then thought, then contemplation, then *vijñāna*.²³

A fourth method of adoration that the *Upaniṣads* teach is meditation. First hear about the Truth (*śravaṇa*), then cogitate on its

19. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1.2.6.

20. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.3.3.

21. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.12.1.

22. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.13.1.

23. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 7.1-7.

validity (*manana*), and then dive deep into the heart to know It (*nīdīdhyāsana*), say the Upaniṣads. How should one meditate? The *Kaivalya Upaniṣad* teaches meditation step by step. It also says (mantra 9), that the Self and Om should become two pieces of firesticks, by rubbing which the fire of knowledge will awaken. There are other Upaniṣads also that teach meditation. For instance,

*Trirunnataṁ sthāpya samāṁ śarīraṁ
hyīndriyāṇi manasā sanniveśya;
Brahmodūpenā pratāreta vidvān
srotāṁsi sarvāṇi bhayāvahāni.*

Keeping the body straight, with the chest, neck and head erect, keeping the senses and the mind concentrated in the region of the heart, the wise should cross the ocean of the world which cause immense fear by the boat of Brahman.²⁴

Worship of Elders

A fourth method of adoration is service. The Upaniṣads are never tired of glorifying the ideal of service. By service do all the disciples attain their spiritual masters' grace. By service do wives attain illumination. By service do the kings and rulers attain illumination. This service is of course done with the idea that the one who is being served is a personification of knowledge, Brahman manifest in that form, or God Himself.

To consider one's parents, teachers, guests, etc as God Himself is a primary teaching of the Vedas. '*Mātr̥ devo bhava, pitr̥ devo bhava, ācārya devo bhava, atithi devo bhava*' (*Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, 1.2.2), is the instruction the teacher gives to his disciples, the future citizens of the world.

Service of the Vedas

A fifth method of adoration, according to the Vedas, is to serve the Vedas themselves. One of the *vedāṅgas* was called *śikṣā*, recitation. Recitation of Vedic hymns was mandatory for students as well as teachers. This was done more as adoration than as duty. The teacher and the taught would both recite the mantras

so that '*saha nau yaśaḥ; saha nau brahma-varcasam*, both will have glory, both will attain the splendour of Brahman' (*Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, 1.3.1). By repeating the Vedic hymns, Indra bestows enlightened intellect or *medhā*. The reciter will also become immortal, says the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*. This Upaniṣad says that the student has the right to study as well as to teach. So a student is told never to give up *svādhyāya* and *pravacana*, spreading Vedic knowledge.

In what way does one serve the Vedas? The Vedas are nothing but an encyclopaedic collection of truths and revelations. By memorizing them, chanting them, teaching them, propagating them and following at least one or two of their teachings, service is rendered to the truths, or Truth Itself. Swami Vivekananda says that 'by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times.' If they are spiritual laws, they are nothing but God Himself. When we meditate and spread the ideals of the Vedas, we are only adoring the Truth.

Conclusion

In the *Praśna Upaniṣad*, we read about six disciples who went to Pippalāda, the knower of Brahman, to seek Brahman knowledge. After they were satisfied with their teacher's instructions, they sang the praise of their teacher. We may join these six disciples in offering our salutations to the great seers of Truth, the sages, who did so much for humanity:

*Tvaṁ hi naḥ pitā yo'smākam
avidyāyāḥ paraṁ paraṁ tārāyasi;
Namaḥ parama-ṛṣibhyo
namaḥ parama-ṛṣibhyah.*

O teacher! You are our father who takes us across from this shore of ignorance to that other shore of knowledge. Salutations to the supreme seers of Truth. Salutations to the supreme seers of Truth.²⁵ □

24. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 2.8.

25. *Praśna Upaniṣad*, 6.8.

Ideal Adoration

As we shall see in the following pages, different religions suggest different types of adoration. However, is there some type of adoration which could be practised by anyone on the globe? The Bhāgavata mentions that type of adoration, and we publish some verses, based on Swami Tapasyanandaji's translation. True adoration is serving the Lord in living beings.

भूतेषु वीरुद्ध्य उदुत्तमा ये
सरीसृपास्तेषु सबोधनिष्ठाः ।
ततो मनुष्याः प्रमथास्ततोऽपि
गन्धर्वसिद्धा विबुधानुगा ये ॥५.५.२१॥

Among all objects in existence, plants are superior to stocks and stones. Animals with consciousness are superior to plants. Amongst animals, human beings are superior. Higher than these are holy persons.

घृता तनूरुशति मे पुराणी
येनेह सत्त्वं परमं पवित्रम् ।
शमो दमः सत्यमनुग्रहश्च
तपस्तिक्ष्णानुभवश्च यत्र ॥५.५.२४॥

I love holy persons. In this world, it is the holy person who holds within himself or herself My spirit and My Truth. I do not find any one equal to the holy person in whom the supremely pure qualities like sense-control, austerity, forbearance, truthfulness, benevolence towards all, and spiritual realization are present.

मत्तोऽप्यनन्तात्परतः परस्मात्
स्वर्गापवर्गाधिपतेर्न किञ्चित् ।
येषां किमु स्यादितरेण तेषां
अकिञ्चनानां मयि भक्तिभाजाम् ॥५.५.२५॥

Such wonderful devotees, who have nothing to call their own, do not pray for any personal advantage from Me. Why will they seek small, perishable, worldly advantages?

सर्वाणि मद्विष्ण्यतया भलद्धि-
श्चराणि भूतानि सुता द्युवाणि ।
सम्भावितव्यानि पदे पदे वो
विविक्तदृग्भिस्तदुद्गर्हणं मे ॥५.५.२६॥

Seeing that all things moving and unmoving are in Me alone, true devotees serve and adore them again and again with sincere feeling. This indeed is My real worship.

मनोवचोदृक्करणेहितस्य
साक्षात्कृतं मे परिवर्हणं हि ।
विना पुमान् येन महाविमोहात्
कृतान्तपोषाच्च विमोक्तुमीशेत् ॥५.५.२७॥

The true meaning of all that a person does by mind, speech, sight and other organs of knowledge and action is only this: it is My adoration alone. Without such adoration, human beings will not be able to overcome the noose of death, which consists in the infatuation of looking upon the body as the Spirit.

He who wants to serve Shiva must serve His children. It is said in the Shastra that those who serve the servants of God are His greatest servants.

—Swami Vivekananda

Hindu Adoration

To compress an oceanic subject into a small article is like inserting an elephant inside the eye of a needle. So only a preliminary introduction to the mammoth ideas on Hindu adoration is attempted here by a former editor of Prabuddha Bharata.

Why Adoration?

Adoration is life. Rather, to the Hindu, life itself is adoration. Whatever the Hindu does is an adoration of the Lord. For the Hindu, there can't be two lives, one secular and the other spiritual. His entire life is one, and that is an elongated act of adoration of the Supreme. Śrī Kṛṣṇa has declared in the *Gītā*: 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer, whatever you give, and whatever you undertake, all that must be My adoration—an offering unto Me.'¹ How life could become transformed into an adoration of the Divine has been beautifully explained in many hymns. Adoration is not merely when the Hindu prays, but his sitting, standing, sleeping, eating, seeing, talking, every one of his actions could be an adoration of the Lord. Life itself is an adoration.

Why adoration? Hinduism is moksha dharma, the religion of liberation. Living beings are trichotomous by nature—this was a fundamental discovery of Hinduism. The only aim of Hinduism is to make the individual realize the Self or Atman. This is the highest goal, the greatest achievement of life, the true spirituality. Starting from the Vedic hymns and sacrifices to the worship of God in every being, there are numerous methods of adoration. But 'all religions and all methods of work and worship lead us to one and the same goal,'² which is the attainment of freedom of

the Self. The Atman within each being is the source of all goodness, bliss, happiness, existence, and peace. Until we know the Atman, we keep failing miserably in all our attempts to find peace or happiness in other things. To show us that we must go after the pearl and

not the shell, and to teach us how to obtain the pearl from the oyster bed, and out of the mollusc, is the goal of Hinduism. The rest is secondary. If a man has fallen into a deep well, the only concern will be to bring him out; why he fell, at what time he fell, how he fell, etc, are all secondary details. Vivekananda says:

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free.

This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

The Goal and the Paths

What's the nature of this release or liberation? Moksha is liberation from suffering caused by ignorance, which goads us to love the non-Self, desire the world, and perform actions for attaining them. Our actions leave a residue behind in the mind, called *saṁskāra*, and these *saṁskāras* make us desire the same



Oṃkāra,
the source of everything

1. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 9.27.

2. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 1, p. 108. [Hereafter, *Complete Works*.]

3. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 124.



The performance of āraṭi
Art by Purnachandra Chakraborty

things again and again (*vāsanā*) and makes us act again and again (*karmāśaya*); therefore we take endless births. We go on desiring, coming and going, and suffering. Liberation is release from the hold of *saṁskāra*, which is the cause of suffering. How are we liberated from this terrible *saṁskāra*? When the light of knowledge, which is within us, shines forth, the darkness of ignorance goes, taking along with it the products of darkness. We may attain knowledge by God's or guru's grace, or by self-effort. The *Kulārṇava Tantra* (17.70) says that worship of the Lord is done in order to destroy the effects of past actions, to be released from bondage, and to attain desired fruits:

*Punarjanmānu-śamanāt
janma-mṛtyu nivāraṇāt;
Saṁpūrṇa phaladānācca
pūjēti kathitā priye.*

What happens when we become liberated? We don't evaporate into thin air, but de-

limit ourselves. We become universal. We realize our true nature, which is infinite knowledge, bliss, and being absolute. Scriptures (see *Bhāgavata*, 3.29.13) mention four stages of liberation: one, attaining the world of the Lord (*sālokya*), two, becoming one with Him (*sāyujya*), three, being with Him (*sāmīpya*), and four, attaining His nature (*sārūpya*), depending upon our inclinations and choice. A true devotee doesn't wish for any of these but desires only to love God. The *jñāni's* ideal, however, is knowing his true nature, which is Brahman.

Hinduism endeavours at making every individual seek God or the Self within, and become free. However, since the world is too strong a force and attracts ordinary minds like ours, not many wish to lead spiritual lives fully. Only a few want release from this world's attractions. We shall concentrate on the adoration of such.

Who Wants Release?

The world is a combination of good and evil. So though all are essentially divine, from the practical viewpoint there are both good and bad human beings. The bad don't seek anything higher, and so a major chunk of human beings are left out of any spiritual consideration. But the wicked could be 'religious': there are instances where even thieves and dacoits pray to the gods for success in their ventures. Of the other half which may be termed good, not all are aware that we are in bondage. But all are aware of the frequent blows we receive from the world which we love so dearly. So, whenever we suffer, we resort to God. Such adorers are called *ārta bhaktas*, devotees in distress. Again, there may be some of us who are neither interested in bondage and liberation, nor are sensitive enough to experience the blows of the world as really painful. We are deeply involved in the world and its commodities, and are happy if we get more and more of them. God for us is a benevolent provider. Our relationship with God is limited to the extent that we pray to Him to fulfil our desires. This type is called *arthārthī bhaktas*. A



A Śaivite's worship of the linga

third type of people are inquirers and want to know if there's a God really, if this world is real, if their own lives have any meaning, and so on. Since the world around them

can't provide all answers to their queries, they go to God. This type is called *jijñāsu bhaktas*. Out of such people, a few understand bondage, the Self, liberation, etc. This type alone seek freedom from bondage; even amongst such seekers, only a few succeed. In the *Bhāgavata* (3.29), Sage Kapila teaches Devahūti about the different types of devotees, and says that those who seek release from bondage alone are right.

Methods of Release

Hindus no doubt believe in numerous gods and goddesses, but they know that it is the one supreme God who has been given various names and forms. That one supreme Godhead, called Brahman or *Sat* or *Tat*, has been given innumerable forms and names according to His will, to suit the tastes of the masses, as also out of love. Moreover, God comes down occasionally as avatars and sets up newer ideals and idols before humanity. From hundreds of village deities to Kālī, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī, there are countless names to that one supreme Truth. The worshippers of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa are called Vaiṣṇavas, the worshippers of Śiva are called Śaivas, and the worshippers

of Śakti or the Divine Mother are called Śāktas. In the elementary stages, there will be some differences between these different groups, and Sri Ramakrishna puts this humorously:

How vain people are about their own sects! There are weavers in the villages near Kāmārpukur. Many of them are Vaishnavas and like to talk big. They say: 'Which Vishnu does he worship? The Preserver? Oh, we wouldn't touch him!' Or: 'Which Siva are you talking about? We accept the Ātmārāma Śiva.' Or again, 'Please explain to us which Hari you worship.' They spin their yarn and indulge in talk like that.⁴

Just as there are gods, there are numerous practices too. Beginning with ancestor worship, through meditation in a corner, to the worship of all beings, there are so many types of 'Hinduism' in practice. Some worship snakes, some trees, some different forms of goddesses, and some different forms of gods; some serve their parents, some their spiritual teachers, some guests; some do good deeds, some pour oblations into fire, some feed monastics, some recite hymns, some repeat mantras. Then again there are many festivals, fastings, occasional rituals, family-related rituals, etc. Pilgrimages are yet another form of adoration. In this way, Hindu life is seeped in religiosity, and a person born Hindu can hardly escape being a religious person.

There are people who frown and belittle such a huge number of gods and goddesses as well as such endless practices. They don't know.

Unity in variety is the plan of nature, and the Hindu has recognised it. Every other religion lays down certain fixed dogmas, and tries to force society to adopt them. It places before society only one coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry, all alike. If it does not fit John or Henry, he must go without a coat to cover his body. The Hindus have discovered that the ab-

4. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 489. [Hereafter, *Gospel*].



Sūfis and bhaktas together: An old painting

solite can only be realised, or thought of, or stated, through the relative, and the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols—so many pegs to hang the spiritual ideas on. It is not that this help is necessary for every one, but those that do not need it have no right to say that it is wrong. Nor is it compulsory in Hinduism.⁵

Variety is the beauty of Hinduism; there's no regimentation here at all. Thousands of saints have come, tens of schools of thought have sprung up, thousands of songs and hymns have been sung, thousands of prayers have been recited and God and His grace have been experienced in countless ways. However, while allowing for variety, Hinduism never for a moment forgets the ideal. A famous *Bhāgavata* verse (3.29.21) says:

5. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 13.

'I am in all beings as their Self. Disregarding My presence there, people make a show of worshipping Me in images.' But image worship is also allowed for the masses: 'People should, however, worship Me in images along with discharging their duties like serving fellow beings until they realize My presence in all beings' (*Bhāgavata*, 3.29.25).

Image Worship

'Worship' has several synonyms: *pūjā*, *ārādhana*, *namasyā*, *apaciti*, *arcanā*, *saparyā*, etc. Different schools, Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta, etc, follow different methods of worship. Broadly divided into Vedic and tantric, all forms of worship have some basic similarities. That general system of worship is broadly this:

*Suddha-nyāsādi-pūrvāṅga-
karma-nirvāha-pūrvakam;
Arcanam tūpacārāṇām
syān-mantreṇa-upapādanam.*

'Becoming clean and pure oneself, and worshipping God with several clean articles in a clean place, after performing *nyāsa*, etc, is called puja.⁶ God can be worshipped in any of the following representations: a stone image, a picture (*paṭa*), water (*jala*), *śālagrāma śilā*, *viṣṇu cakra*, *bāṇeśvara līṅga*, *līṅga*, etc. The basic system of Hindu worship, whether tantric or Vedic, has the following rules: (a) purification of the worshipper and the area where worship is done; (b) purification of materials used for worship; (c) invoking the deity; (d) worshipping the five deities (*pañca-devatās*)—Guru, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Śiva, Durgā; (e) meditation on the deity chosen for worship; (f) mental worship; (g) worshipping the deity of one's choice with 5, 10, 16, 24, 36, or 64 items; (h) praying for the welfare of all beings; and (i) offering everything, and surrendering to the deity—using suitable mantras. The most fundamental point to be noted in Hindu worship is, every priest knows that God is immanent and should be brought out from his or her heart, placed in the emblem outside, worshipped, and taken back. '*Devo bhūtvā*

6. See *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 'Pūrvā Vibhāga'.

devānām yajeta, become a god yourself and worship God.' Though there are so many details, the four basic elements of any worship are: *snapana* (bathing the Lord's image or symbol; purification), *pūjana* (adoring Him using several items, like offering food, drink, flowers, clothes, etc; service), *homa* (fire ritual; sacrifice), and *ātma-samarpaṇa* (also called *balidāna*, the offering of oneself; surrender). Again, worship could be daily (*nitya*), occasional (*naimittika*), or desire-born (*kāmya*). In adoration, there are the *sāttvika*, *rājasika*, and *tāmasika* types: 'Sāttvic bhakti is known to God alone. It makes no outward display. ... A man with rājasic bhakti feels like making a display of his devotion before others. ... A man with tāmasic bhakti shows the courage and boisterousness of a highway robber.'

We said Hindu life is itself adoration. The Hindu way of life is ruled by basic laws or codes, and they divide the Hindu life into four stages (*āśramas*) — *brahmacarya*, *gārhaṣṭhya*, *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa*. Every stage has its own system of adoration. The laws state how a Hindu should live in each of the stages, what



Mother Durgā



Swami Vivekananda, the saviour of Hinduism

duties he or she has to perform, etc. Service to family members, guests, neighbours, animals, birds, etc (*pañca yajñas*) through the body (*kāyika*), words (*vācika*), and mind (*mānasa*) in these *āśramas* are adoration of the Divine. Then again there was the system of *caturvarṇa*. The *brāhmaṇas*, *ksatriyas*, *vaiśyas* and *śūdras* adored the Lord through the performance of their respective duties. The brahmins, specially, had only one duty: adoring the Lord and serving divine knowledge.

On the whole, the plan of Hinduism is that every Hindu, whatever he or she may be doing, should be naturally religious, and should be as selfless as possible. The *Gītā* says that everything one does could be a *yajña*, sacrifice.

Some sacrifice to the gods, some to the Self, some practise self-control by controlling their sense-organs, some practise yoga, some sacrifice their wealth, some study, some control their



Preparations for adoration in a south Indian family: Art by Natesan

breath, some eat less. All of them are indeed practising religion.⁸

Adoration through Yogas

Apart from the general systems of worship, the Vedas and Upaniṣads, the sources of Hinduism, have shown several ways to the realization of Truth, as not all human minds are of the same type. Studying all human types, Swami Vivekananda has classified spiritual aspirants into four broad groups. He says:

There are four general types of men—the rational, the emotional, the mystical, and the worker. For each of these we must provide suitable forms of worship. There comes the rational man, who says: 'I care not for this form of wor-

ship. Give me the philosophical, the rational—that I can appreciate.' So for the rational man is the rational philosophic worship. There comes the worker. He says: 'I care not for the worship of the philosopher. Give me work to do for my fellow men.' So for him is provided work as the path of worship. As for the mystical and the emotional, we have their respective modes of devotion. All these men have, in religion, the elements of their faith.⁹

Hinduism has shown four paths to the four broad groups mentioned above.

First, for the rational type, there is *jñāna yoga*, or the path of knowledge. This path is for razor-sharp intellects, who can pierce through the veils of falsehood and ignorance and see Light. Through enquiry, discussion, and rejection of the unreal, the *jñāni* realizes his true nature as the Atman, which is nothing but Brahman or Absolute. *Jñāna* also is adoration because '*jñāna-yajñena cāpyanye yajanto mām-upāsate*, some worship Me by adoring Me through knowl-

edge,¹⁰ says Kṛṣṇa.

Second, for the proletarian type there is *karma yoga*. Karma means action, and yoga means concentration. To work with concentration is the secret of all true action, says Swami Vivekananda. The *Gītā* had propounded the path of selfless action already. How to perform desireless actions? Swami Vivekananda says that concentration is the secret. When we perform work with concentration, our lower self—that which desires and aspires—cannot raise its head. So all concentrated work is for the good of others because

8. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 4.24-31.

9. *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 418.

10. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 9.15.

there is no selfishness there. Work done for the good of others is an adoration of the Divine, as it liberates the soul, for Kṛṣṇa says: '*Śvākarmanā tam-abhyarcya siddhiṁ vindati mānavah*, a human being succeeds in spiritual life by adoring God through his natural activities.'¹¹

Third, for the reflective type, there is *rāja yoga*, simply called yoga. Yoga is the art of concentration, aimed at controlling the endless mental modifications that rise and fall. When they are controlled, the Truth stands revealed. Yoga too is adoration, as the Lord declares in the *Gītā* (6.47-8): 'A yogi is greater than persons of austerity or knowledge, and amongst yogis, he or she who adores Me with a fixed mind is the best.'

Fourth, the emotional type of people have *bhakti yoga*, the yoga of devotion. Devotion is supreme love for the Lord. Though for the ordinary the world and its products are lovable objects, for the one who seeks release from the hold of the false world God alone is the dearest. He or she loves God alone.

*Yā prītiravivekānām
viśayeśvanapāyini;
Tvāmanusmarataḥ sām
hṛdayān-māpasarpāt.*

That love which the worldly have towards the world should the devotee have towards his or her dear Lord.¹²

Who is God? He who creates, protects and takes back everything is God. Since He has created everything, God is our creator also. So He is our dear father or dear mother. He is everything. The devotee can address Him father, mother, friend, beloved, son, daughter, or whatever he or she wishes. Ramakrishna, following the bhakti scriptures, says that in order to realize God, the devotee must assume any of the following attitudes: *śānta* (the peaceful attitude), *dāsya* (the servant attitude), *sakhya* (the friend's attitude), *vātsalya* (the parent's attitude), *madhura* (the



Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva

beloved's attitude) or *mātr bhāva* (the child's attitude towards its mother). To develop any one of such relationships with God, and acting accordingly, is the highest form of adoration.

How does a true devotee adore God? The devotee initially hears about God from holy persons, resorts to a guru, serves him, and accepts his instructions. He then follows the instructions, and begins to worship the Lord. This stage, called the *vaidhī bhakti* stage, is so called because here the devotee follows scriptural injunctions. The devotee worships God's representations in the image in the beginning. He or she visits temples, serves devotees, listens to *kīrtanas*, sings hymns, chants mantras, and does many other favourable things to please the Lord. He begins to imitate the companions of the Lord and tries to serve Him as they did. This is the *rāgānugā* stage. Gradually, his mind becomes purer, and the devotee understands that God resides not only in the image, but within him also. He becomes more and more indrawn, and begins to contemplate the Lord's form, name, and glories. The devotee begins to serve the Lord who is his indweller with a deep bond of love (*rāgātmikā*

11. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 18.46.

12. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 1.20.19.



Sri Ramakrishna

stage). As the mind attains greater and greater purity, the devotee reaches a stage when he sees that God Himself has become everything. Thus he begins to see God's play in His creation and enjoys bliss (*bhāva bhakti* stage). Finally, when the devotee understands that God himself is everything, he begins to look upon everyone as God, all barriers between him and God goes, and begins to serve people around him. Sri Ramakrishna says that amongst *bhaktas* there are classes:

These are the pravartaka, the sādha, the siddha and the siddha of the siddha. He who has just set foot on the path may be called a pravartaka. He may be called a sādha who has for some time been practising spiritual disciplines, such as worship, japa, meditation, and the chanting of God's name and glories. He may be called a siddha who has known from inner experience that God exists.... There is another type, known as the siddha of the siddha, the 'supremely perfect.' It is quite a different thing when one talks to the master intimately, when one knows God¹³ very intimately through love and devotion.

When once love for God awakens in the heart of the devotee, no rules and regulations are necessary. The rituals that were performed following scriptural injunctions fall away. In their place, there is loving adoration of the Beloved. The devotee then sings, dances, prays, cries, pants, and lives in the Lord's world. It is through such devotees that wonderful prayers, songs, hymns, etc have come down to us. Says Swami Vivekananda: 'How to worship Him? Through love. "He is to be worshipped as the one beloved, dearer than everything in this and the next life."' ¹⁴ This love is the highest form of adoration, a love that makes the devotee 'mad'.

There's a beautiful mantra, listening to which Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi. This mantra gives in a nutshell the entire gamut of Hindu adoration. This mantra is found in the *Uttara Gītā* (3.7):

*Agnir-devo dvijātinaṁ
munināṁ hr̥di daivatam;
Pratimā svalpa-buddhināṁ
sarvatra-samadārśinām.*

God is in the fire for sacrificers. God is in the hearts of the *munis* or sages who practise meditation. God is in the images for beginners. But God is everywhere for the seers who have attained the highest.

Sri Ramakrishna's life is the best example of the gradation of Hindu adoration. He began with the adoration of Mother Kālī in her image. From there he was led to that threshold from where everything and everyone appeared as God Himself. The breadth and depth of Hindu adoration is, though the enlightened ones know that God is not limited to His images, they still adore God in them because God being the creator of everything is also the creator of the image. If thousands of saints like Mīrābāī, Tukārām, Jñāneśvar, Kanakadāsa, Tulsīdās, could attain everything through image worship alone, image worship is not futile or ignorance.

13. *Gospel*, p. 114-5.

14. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 11.



A sage sings bhajans: Art by Natesan



Śrī Rāma

ships the Lord, what's the use of austerity?' Worship or adoration, done with love, is everything, the whole of spirituality.

The one singular feature of this ancient religion is, the questions of sin, weakness, etc are always given very little importance. God doesn't count our sins and mistakes, because we are his children. Children, after all, are bound to make mistakes. This is the dear relationship between God and us according to Hinduism. No one is damned in this religion. Even the most wicked according to our standards can be a devotee soon. The Lord declares that he has no likes and dislikes; He loves all beings equally:

I am impartial towards all beings. But I love those who worship Me. Even if a person of extremely bad conduct worships Me with one-pointed devotion, he is to be considered holy; for he has resolved rightly, and he will soon be possessed of a virtuous mind and shall attain liberation.¹⁶

Hindu adoration is the simplest, the easiest and the most wonderful system. It's a system which anyone in any stage of life may follow and succeed. Why human beings alone, even animals have attained the Lord's grace through such adoration. All that the Lord wants is love. Where there is love, there is success. □

God wants love. He declares that he does not want anything from His devotee but love¹⁵: 'Whoever offers Me even a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or a drop of water with love, I accept that gift from the pure-hearted soul.'

There are rules of worship, systems of adoration, methods of service to the Lord, hymns and prayers, rules about fasting and rituals. Everything is there in Hinduism. But if the soul cries to God with love, God cannot remain far away. If there's love, the Lord is nearer than the nearest.

The *Nārada Pañcarātra* says: '*Nārādhito harir-yadi, tapasā tataḥ kim? Ārādhito harir-yadi, tapasā tataḥ kim?* If one doesn't worship the Lord, what's the use of austerity? If one wor-

15. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 9.26.

16. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 9.29-30.

A Christian Experience of Adoration

THE REVEREND CANON CHARLES P. GIBBS

Readers of Prabuddha Bharata had the opportunity of reading an excellent article by the Reverend Canon Charles P. Gibbs in our January 2001 number. Here's another inspiring article from him. In this brilliant article, Rev Canon Gibbs presents a beautiful picture of Christian latria. Reverend Gibbs is Executive Director, United Religious Initiative, San Francisco, USA.



Jesus Christ

Christian adoration is a journey into the depths of infinite mystery, of divine yearning and love made visible in history in human form, and beyond. God's yearning and love evoke yearning and love in us. Our yearning and love for God find expression in adoration of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. So, for Christians, adoration is a journey to a starlit manger in Bethlehem and beyond. It is a journey to the foot of a cross on a hill called Golgotha (or Calvary) just outside the city walls of Jerusalem, and beyond. It is a journey to an empty tomb in a garden near Golgotha, and beyond. Christian adoration is a journey into the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and beyond. It is a journey of song, story, prayer and silence that defines the Christian liturgical year, a Christian's sleeping

Humbly I adore thee, Verity unseen,
who thy glory hidest 'neath these shadows mean;
lo, to thee surrendered, my whole heart is bowed,
tranced as it beholds thee, shrined within the cloud.
Taste and touch and vision to discern thee fail;
faith, that comes by hearing, pierces through the veil.
I believe whate'er the Son of God hath told;
what the Truth hath spoken, that for truth I hold.
O memorial wondrous of the Lord's own death;
living Bread that givest all thy creatures breath,
grant my spirit ever by thy life may live,
to my taste thy sweetness neverfailing give.
Jesus whom now hidden, I by faith behold,
what my soul doth long for, that thy word foretold:
face to face thy splendour, I at last shall see,
in the glorious vision, blessed Lord of thee.

—attributed to Thomas Aquinas

and waking—every act no matter how humble or exalted, and beyond. The practices of adoration are as varied as human history, culture and place. This is one story, which, if it had music, would be a song.

We begin with a miraculous birth, in its mystery chronicled differently in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. It is the story of a young woman named Mary, and Joseph, her betrothed. Luke tells of their journey from Galilee over dusty roads through Jerusalem to Bethlehem. There they find no room at the inn, and must settle for lodging in a stable. A humble manger where oxen feed on hay becomes a cradle which draws us into the mystery of this holy birth and into the depths of adoration. *O come let us adore him.*

For Christians, the Christmas story is

more than an event in a starlit stable two thousand years ago. The Christmas miracle comes newly alive each year as Christians all over the world gather to share in this holy birth that breathes God's love and yearning for humanity. In response, this birth calls for each human heart to open to be a home for God dwell on Earth in the form of a helpless child, born into poverty; obscure, unnoticed by most, feared and pursued by a few. To those blessed ones who respond in love and yearning to the word of this humbly glorious birth it is an invitation

to be transfixed and transformed in adoration before the Holy.

When I contemplate adoration at Christmas I see the image of my younger brother Eric, his face aglow with reverence, awe and wonder processing into church at the midnight service on Christmas Eve bearing the Christ Child on a velvet cushion toward the manger as the congregation sings, as though the choirs of angels were among us. Hear the music:



Jesus Christ

So, we journey to the manger with the shepherds, with wise ones from the East and with the angel chorus to offer our lives in service of the one who is born as God come to Earth so that we on Earth might draw nearer to God in worship and service, might give birth to God on Earth by more fully realizing

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him, born the King of angels;
O come, let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.
God from God, Light from Light eternal,
lo! He abhors not the Virgin's womb;
only begotten Son of the Father
O come, let us adore him, ... Christ, the Lord.
Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
glory to God, glory in the highest;
O come, let us adore him, ... Christ, the Lord.
See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze;
we too will thither bend our joyful footsteps;
O come, let us adore him, ... Christ, the Lord.
Child, for us sinners poor and in a manger,
we would embrace thee with love and awe;
who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?
O come, let us adore him, ... Christ, the Lord.
Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be all glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;
O come, let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.

—John Francis Wade, trans. Frederick Oakley

the image of God in ourselves. Adoration at the manger is an opening into God's overflowing love for humanity taking human form. We adore so that we might be filled with God's love, transformed by God's love; so that we might commit ourselves to be God's love in the world.

As Christians watch in wondrous adoration at the birth of the Christ Child, so they watch in pained adoration at Jesus' death. From Christianity's earliest days, theologians have sought, from an intellectual perspective, to provide theological interpretations for the redemptive power of Jesus' crucifixion. Similarly, on an affective level, Christians at all times and in all places have sought to be united with Jesus in his suffering. For most Christians, being with Jesus in his death is an act of compassion in response to the ultimate gift. As Jesus said, 'Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.' As Jesus laid down his life, in faithfulness to God, for humanity, so we seek to be with Jesus and to offer our lives to and through him in his moment of death.

In the story of the last hours of Jesus' life, the gospels tell of him going out of Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane where he drew aside with his friends to pray. Though he asked them to watch with him, they were weary and unable to stay awake. So Jesus was



Christ: by Leonardo da Vinci

In taking this journey, a journey of adoration of the one who gave his life freely for all, we take a journey into our own suffering and

left alone in his agonized wrestling with his fate, with his anticipation of his arrest and execution. When he was arrested, his followers in fear deserted him. So Jesus walked alone down a path that led through a trial and sentencing by the Roman authorities to death on a cross on Calvary.

The gospels tell that during Jesus' final hours on the cross a small group of faithful women, including his mother (who, it should be noted, has revealed the feminine face of God for countless Christians and so has been a focus of adoration throughout the Church's history), moved by a love more powerful than fear, watched from a distance. These holy few who had been with Jesus in his life were near by, perhaps risking death themselves to be with him at his death. So each year during Holy Week, Christians all over the world journey with these followers of Jesus and journey with Jesus during the final week of his life, knowing that this journey leads into great suffering and death.

Go to dark Gethsemane, ye that feel the tempter's
power;
your Redeemer's conflict see, watch with him one
bitter hour;
turn not from his griefs away, learn of Jesus
Christ to pray.
Follow to the judgement hall; view the Lord of
life arraigned;
O the wormwood and the gall! O the pangs his
soul sustained!
Shun not suffering, shame or loss; learn of him to
bear the cross.
Calvary's mournful mountain climb; there,
adoring at his feet,
Mark the miracle of time, God's own sacrifice
complete;
'It is finished!' hear him cry; learn of Jesus Christ
to die.

—by James Montgomery

the suffering of all humanity. We journey into our own faithfulness and unfaithfulness. We journey into those ways we have crucified Je-

sus anew by our acts of injustice, violence and callous indifference. We seek the death of that within us which separates us from the love of God and from true service in God's name. As ones made in God's image, we seek the birth of heightened compassion that will lead us to act for God in the world, to be forces of peace, justice, righteousness and healing. We seek in this faithful response to God's great love and yearning to find in death the gate to new life.

Thanks be to God, the journey of Christian adoration does not end with death on a cross and the darkness of the tomb. It does not end with pain and suffering. The Christian story reaches its climax on Easter morning when Jesus' followers discover that the tomb is empty, that death has been vanquished. The gospels tell of the faithful women journeying at dawn on the first day of the week. They are



Christ: Art by Shubhra Nag

Having been with Jesus through his death, we now share in his resurrection in a glorious outpouring of adoration. We celebrate God's triumph over death in the risen Christ. Sharing in this triumph brings with it the challenge to live a life free from fear, a life truly dedicated to being God's people here on Earth. As God has given life so lavishly, so we

prepared, as a final act of adoration, to anoint Jesus' body for burial.

Instead, they are greeted by an empty tomb. As angels proclaimed Jesus' birth, so an angel now proclaims the risen Christ: 'He is not here, he is risen!' The tomb cannot contain the one his followers had come to know as the Lord of Life. God, not death, has the final word. Beyond the cross and tomb is resurrection and a new life lived in the experience that life and love, not death and suffering, are sovereign. The word spreads with the swiftness and force of a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Even as the word spreads, many are fearful at this great miracle, and some doubt. Yet even in our fear and doubt, Christians throughout the centuries have gathered in adoration and song:

Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!
 our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!
 who did once upon the cross, Alleluia!
 suffer to redeem our loss, Alleluia!
 Hymns of praise then let us sing, Alleluia!
 unto Christ, our heavenly King, Alleluia!
 who endured the cross and grave, Alleluia!
 sinners to redeem and save, Alleluia!
 But the pain which he endured, Alleluia!
 our salvation hath procured, Alleluia!
 now above the sky he's king, Alleluia!
 where the angels ever sing, Alleluia!
 Sing we to our God above, Alleluia!
 praise eternal as his love, Alleluia!
 praise him all ye heavenly host, Alleluia!
 Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Alleluia!

—14th century Latin hymn;
 (4th Stanza by Charles Wesley)

are called to give our lives in return. The unserved gift of our lives to God as a harvest of peace, justice, righteousness and healing is the true Christian response to the triumph of the resurrection.

Sadly, for many Christians throughout history the victory of Easter has led to a triumphalism which has inflicted countless

pains and sufferings on people of other faiths. For such Christians the boundless generosity of a God who can reach into the darkness of death and draw out life is bestowed only on those who have come to know God through the Christian story. In this belief, they have sought to impose Christianity, often violently, on others. It is perhaps the greatest sacrilege committed in the name of Christianity, the greatest desecration of Easter, that so much violence has been committed in the name of the one who revealed God as love, who came to be seen by his followers as the one fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of the coming Prince of Peace.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing Christianity is both to claim the gift, the glory and the challenge of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection and to honour God's gifts to and through other faiths. I believe that facing this challenge is one of the 'new things,' to borrow again from Isaiah, which God is working through us to accomplish in our time. And, I believe that the practice of adoration will help us meet this challenge.

The more we give ourselves in adoration to God, the more we might see the image of God reflected in our Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim, Jain and Zoroastrian neighbours, in

our neighbours of all religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions. The more we give ourselves in adoration to God, the more we will be able to honour God's presence and unique expression in each of these traditions. The more we give ourselves in adoration to God, the more we will be able, as people of all faiths, to offer together the ultimate adoration to God—transformed lives in service of a transformed world that fully reflects God's unbounded love and yearning for all life.

The celebration of Jesus' birth, death and resurrection, which mark the high points of the Christian liturgical year, provide the essential themes for Christian adoration. They also provide moments when Christians around the world gather in corporate worship which is infused with adoration. But the experience of adoration is not limited to these occasions, or even to every Sunday, when Christians around the world gather to commemorate Jesus' life, death and resurrection in the Eucharist. These moments of heightened adoration help create the context for our lives, sleeping and waking, to be an endless act of adoration, a living sacrifice to God and to the world which God has made. □

The Lord Loves the Heart's Adoration, not Mere Ceremonials

A priest was passing by the hut of a poor shepherd. He overheard the shepherd's lamentations: 'Beloved Lord, show Thyself to me. Come to me. I shall give You nice green grass to eat. I shall purchase a new bell for you. I shall dye Your hair and trim them beautifully. Come, O my dear Lamb, I shall embrace You and keep You always happy.' The priest was shocked and annoyed. To call the Lord a lamb! He entered the cottage and scolded the shepherd: 'What business have you to defile the holy person of the Lord? Do you consider the Lord to be a brute, one of your herd? Beware of such lamentations and babbles in the future.' The poor and ignorant shepherd was terrified. He repented his mistake, fell again and again at the priest's feet and sought his pardon.

That night, the Lord appeared in the priest's dream and rebuked him for having deprived Him of the shepherd's true devotion. The Lord said: 'What business have you, sir, to interfere if I wish to be loved like a lamb? Beware of false pretensions. The heart is what counts and not the apparent acts. Ceremonials and rituals are not as important as a heart that loves.'

—*retold from Tales from the Mystics of the East*

Buddhist Adoration

DR HERMANN OLDENBERG

The Buddhist method of adoration comes from the horse's mouth. Dr Hermann Oldenberg was a great Buddhist scholar, who edited the Vinaya Pitaka and the Dipavamsa in Pali. His great German book, Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order was translated by William Hoey into English. We publish relevant portions from this book.

The observance of the fast day is the most prominent and almost the only observance of the ancient Buddhist cultus, if the word 'cultus' [system or variety of worship] can be at all applied to these most simple and plain external forms of mutual religious life. For a faith, which looks upon man's own heart as the sole place in which decisions between happiness and ruin can be carried into effect, what the lip utters and what the hand does can have value only in so far as it is a concomitant of, a symbol corresponding to, that internal process. And, above all, in the first age of the young Buddhist community must that very opposition to the old faith with its ceremoniousness, with its animal sacrifices and soma offerings, with its hosts of singing and mumbling priests, have been especially keenly felt and led to the result, that so much the more earnest heed was taken to preserve the internal character of the individual faith free from every non-essential. We must keep before us the fact that anything in the way of a mysterious, such as that from which the early Christian cultus drew its vitality, was foreign

to Buddhism; the conception that the divine Head of the Church is not absent from his people, but that he dwells powerfully in their midst as their lord and king, so that all cultus is nothing else but the expression of this continuing living fellowship. The Buddha, however, has entered into Nirvana; if his believers desired to invoke him, he could not hear them. Therefore Buddhism is a religion without prayer. The preaching of Buddha's doctrine, the practice of spiritual abstractions, in which they thought they possessed so powerful an aid to religious effort, permeated the whole life of the brethren, but they found no expression in the forms of a regularly organized cultus; for this last there was little room left in that universal sway, conceivable only in a monastic order, of religious thought over every word which the believer utters, and over every step he takes.



Bhagavan Buddha,
a 5th century Sarnath image

Among the operations of this quasi-cultus stands, as already mentioned, in precedence of everything else, the confessional celebration observed on the 'fast-day', the check, so to speak, employed to determine



Bodhgaya temple, seat of Buddhist adoration

whether the duties of spiritual life have been truly and fully performed by all the brethren. These confessional meetings give above all a lively expression to the cohesion of the members of the Order.

The eldest among the monks in every district calls the meeting, and at evening on the fast-day all the brethren, who are sojourning within the limits of the diocese, come together in the *vihara* chosen for the purpose or whatever other place is selected by the Order, be it a building or a cave in the mountain. No one is permitted to go through the sacred office in an assembly short of the full number.

By the light of a torch the monks take their places in the place of assembly on the low seats prepared for them. No layman, no novice, no nun may be present, for the law of the Order, which is now to be recited in the form of a confessional formula, is regarded as a reserved possession of the monks alone. This

confessional formula, the liturgy *Pātimokkha* ('unburdening'), the oldest of the brethren, or he who otherwise able and qualified, now recites with a loud voice:

'Reverend sirs,' he says, 'let the Order hear me. Today is fast-day, the fifteenth of the month. If the Order is ready, let the Order keep fast-day and have the formula of confession recited. What must the Order do first? Report the declaration of purity, reverend sirs. I shall recite the formula of confession.' The Order present replies: 'We all, who are here present, hear and consider it well.' 'Whoever has committed a transgression,' the leader goes on, 'let him confess it. Where there is no transgression, let him be silent. From your silence I shall infer that you are clear, reverend sirs.'

Next to the half-monthly confessional days the yearly recurring simple and beautiful celebration must be borne in mind, which bears the name of *invitation* (*Pavāraṇā*). When the three months of the rainy season have gone by, before the wandering begins, the brethren in each diocese, who have passed this time in common retirement—they are for the most part friends closely attached to each other—unite in a solemn conference, in which every one, from the oldest to the youngest, sitting in a reverential attitude on the ground, raising his clasped hands, asks his spiritual comrades if he has been guilty of any sin during this period, to name it to him. 'Reverend sirs,' it is then said, 'I invite the Order, if ye have seen anything on my part, or have heard anything, or have any suspicion, have pity on me, reverend sirs, and speak. If I see it, I shall atone for it.'

In these few ceremonious observances has been described the narrow range of that, which, with the disciples of Buddha, takes the place of regular



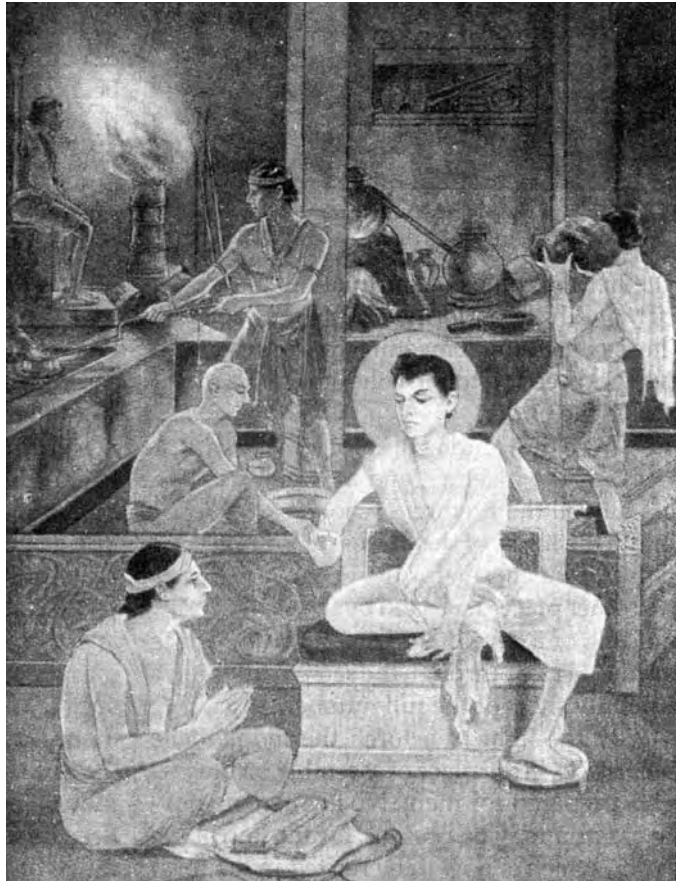
Maitreya: tantric Buddhism

acts of public worship. It will be seen that this cultus, if we wish to call it so, goes only into the outer court of the religious life; it has only to do with maintaining among the monks external correctness in decent behaviour and dealing. Whatever goes beyond this, the keeping up of instructive meditation and religious concentration, is left wholly to the unfettered action of the individual brother, of the individual group of brethren.

It may be here observed that at least the first rudiments of a cultus of another stamp, separated in broad distinction from that which we have discussed, go back into the times with which our sketch has to deal; the rudiments of the veneration attaching to holy places and to Buddha's relics. Four places, it is said, are deserving that believing, noble youths should see them and that their hearts should be moved by them: the place where the holy Buddha was born; the place where he has obtained the highest illumination; the place where he has 'set in motion the wheel of the law,' the place where he, delivered from everything earthly, has entered into the perfect Nirvana. To these places monks and nuns, lay-brothers and lay-sisters have a desire to travel. 'For he, O Ānanda, who dies in the faith on the pilgrimage to such holy places, will, when his body dissolves, beyond death, walk the good road and be born again in the heavenly world.'

The care of Buddha's relics and the institution of festivals in their honour are committed exclusively to the piety of believing laity. 'What are we to do,' Ānanda asks of the Master, when his end is drawing near, 'with the body of the Perfect One?' 'Let not the honours due to the body of the Perfect One trouble you, O Ānanda. Seek ye rather holiness, O Ānanda; be

intent on holiness; live in holiness without blemish, in holy haste, seeking after perfection. There are, Ānanda, wise men among the nobles, the Brāhmins, and the citizens, who believe in the Perfect One; they will do the honours to the body of the Perfect One.' So then after Buddha's death his relics are divided out to a number of princes and nobles, each of whom 'builds a stupa (monument for relics) and institutes a festival'—festivals at which offerings of flowers, ablutions, and illuminations on a grand scale usually play the chief part. The Order of monks as such has nothing to do with this pompous show of veneration; the old rules of the Order have not a word to say about it. □



Nāgārjuna, the great Mādhyamika Buddhist philosopher
A painting by Jatindra Kumar Sen

Adoration in Islamic Mystical Tradition

DR LIAKAT TAKIM

Here's a grand picture of how Muslims, specially the Sufis, adore the Supreme. In this brief article, Dr Takim has drawn a scholarly yet sweet sketch of the devotional practices of the Sufis, specially dhikr, salat and sama'. We thank Dr Liakat Takim, from the University of Denver, USA, for contributing this article. We also thank Smt Rina Chakravarty from Toronto, Canada, for the help she rendered in contacting Dr Takim.

Like many other religious traditions, Islam embodies a very rich and diverse mystical tradition. The mystics of Islam are called Sufis. There is some difference of opinion on the etymology of the word. It is said that the early mystics of 8th-century Arabia were called Sufis because they wore woolen clothes (*suf* means wool in Arabic). Others have speculated that the early mystics of Islam were called Sufis as they tried to purify themselves (the word *safa* means purity).

It was during the Umayyad dynasty in the 8th century that a distinct group of mystics emerged. The worldly outlook of the Umayyad rulers, the rapid expansion of the Islamic empire in the first century of Islam and a general disdain of religious principles led many Muslims to feel that the ideals and values established by the Prophet Muhammad had been destroyed by the ruling elite. This was a major factor that precipitated a group of piety-minded people, the early mystics of Islam.

The Sufis trace the genesis of their esoteric views to the Koran, the Muslim scripture. The Koran mentions many verses that have mystical connotations. For example, it states: 'Wherever you turn, you will find the face of God' (2.115). 'We are closer to human beings than their own jugular veins' (50.17). 'He is with you wherever you may be' (57.4). 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth' (24.35). Such verses encouraged the Sufis' quest for the Divine.

Sufis demonstrate many of the hallmarks

characteristic of holy men in other religious traditions. The Sufi holy man (also called *shaykh*) undergoes a profound religious experience, enabling him to have intimate communion with the Divine in an intensive and personal way. He also performs excessive acts of asceticism, renunciation, self-mortification and other devotional exercises.

In the Sufi understanding of creation, the supreme deity was a hidden treasure that wished to be known. God's hidden treasure can become manifest through the perfection of the self, for it is believed that the divine attributes are reflected in human beings. According to Rumi, a famous mystic of the 13th century, human beings were created to manifest the divine attributes that lie within them. Otherwise, he asks poignantly, if there had been no desire and hope for the fruit why did the gardener plant the tree?

The Sufi interpretation of the story of creation as told by the Koran also envisages human beings as having been separated from their origin which lies in the spiritual realm. Earthly position is to merely manifest the inherent hidden treasures, attain perfection and return to the original spiritual state. A human being's sole purpose is to reflect the divine attributes inherent in him and to fully realize all the possibilities of the human state, returning ultimately to the macrocosm. Once it entered the terrestrial realm, the spirit became so engrossed with worldly pursuits that it forgot its spiritual origins and its pact with God to worship the only one God. Whereas most of us

consider ourselves as human beings who sometimes undergo a spiritual experience, for the Sufis we are actually spiritual beings who are undergoing a transient human experience.

It is in this context that we can comprehend the Sufi quest to experience God in the present world, to feel His majestic presence and to remove the veils that separate the human from the Divine. This mystical quest precipitated the concept of adoring God. Adoration of God, in Islamic mysticism, takes many forms. These range from various forms of ascetic exercises, self-mortification, vigils, protracted prayers, meditation to emulating the spiritual exercises of the Prophet Muhammad.

For the Sufis, an important method of experiencing the Divine is by emulating the Muhammadan paradigm in their practices. These holy men try to replicate in their own life a sense of the spiritual experience of the Prophet himself. They model their inner and outward behaviour on the Prophet, exemplifying his every act. This includes patterning his outer behaviour, and imitating his spiritual exercises as well as his reported inner states. Such modelling became an important medium for the Sufis to link themselves to the Prophet through a spiritual paradigm. As the spiritual heir to the Prophet, the Sufi exemplifies the living paradigm of the Prophetic ideal. Emulating the Prophet in every possible way was an indispensable means to attaining holiness and experiencing the Divine in the same way that the Prophet had. For the Sufis, the virtues of the Prophet are visible in the holy man as a mirror. Due to him, contemporary Muslims can somehow experience Muhammad's character and charisma.

In this brief paper, I am not able to adumbrate the various expressions of adoration in the mystical tradition of Islam. Here I will only discuss a few of them. The most famous form of adoration is a mystical exercise called *dhikr*. This refers to the systematic repetition of God's names so as to attain continuous awareness of God's presence. *Dhikr* entails perpetual chanting of one of God's various names.

Whether done in solitude or in congregation, *dhikr* is often accompanied with head and body movements and can culminate in a Sufi entering a trance.

Dhikr can be performed silently or loudly and is practised at any time or place, for the Sufis maintain that the heart of the faithful must be 'perfumed with the recollection of God' following a tradition in which God says, 'I am the companion of one who remembers Me.'

Dhikr is also seen as performing the important function of inculcating love for the Divine in a Sufi. This is predicated on the view that love for a person implies the repetition of his name and remembering him continuously. Other Sufis compare the heart to a tree which lives and moves only by the breeze of love and is nourished by the water of *dhikr* indicating thereby the growing presence of the Divine in the heart.

Some Sufis prescribe special body positions when undertaking *dhikr*, but the correct position (cross-legged) is considered to be important (but not essential) in the successful performance of *dhikr*. To have the desired effect, *dhikr* must permeate the mystic's whole being, he must forget all other objects and thoughts. It is to be noted that although *dhikr* is directly related to a mental state (since only God is required to be in the mind) no specific formula is prescribed for restricting the constant movements in the mind (unlike the yogic case where the mind is trained so as to concentrate on a single object). The emphasis in *dhikr* is more on being so absorbed by God that everything else becomes insignificant. To quote Shaykh al-'Alawi, a 20th century Sufi master, through the *dhikr* '...the spirit of the disciple would quickly reach beyond the created universe provided that he had sufficient preparation and aptitude. ... The disciple was submerged in the world of the Absolute and his certainty was strengthened by Its Pure Light.'

Dhikr can also engender ecstatic feelings leading to the dissolution of the distinction between the subject and object. True *dhikr*, it is

said, is that you forget your *dhikr*. Other developed forms of *dhikr* show some rudimentary forms of breath control whereby every intake or outlet of breath is to be accompanied by God's recollection. Some forms of retention of breath were encouraged but, unlike the yogic practices, the Sufis never saw breath controlling exercises as an essential part in the *dhikr* sessions.

The Sufi adoration of God is also expressed by the *salat* (ritual prayer) which is, in fact, the second pillar of Islam. The early Sufis saw prayer, in accordance with a Prophetic tradition, as a spiritual ascension bringing the Sufi into an immediate presence of God. The Sufis internalized this important ritual creating, in the process, feelings of awe in themselves.

Many Sufis report ecstatic feelings in their prayers. Prayer is seen as an intimate conversation between the human and the Divine. This also engendered the night prayers in mystical circles. Hasan 'Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, was asked why those who pray at night are most beautiful in appearance? He replied: 'Because they are alone with the All-Merciful who covers them with light from His light.'

True mystical prayers reflect trust in and love for God and inculcate the idea of loving God for His own sake (rather than for attaining heaven or escaping hell). The essence of prayer is, therefore, attaining close proximity to God and adoring His majesty. In Rumi's view, absorption in the Divine Unity is the soul of prayer.

The most controversial Sufi meditational exercise has been the *sama'* (musical sessions). Apart from the methodical chanting accompanying the music, *sama'* also involves mystical dances. *Sama'* is only practised at the higher

levels of the *tariqa* (the Sufi path) and is also capable of enrapturing a mystic and generating extreme forms of ecstasy in him. At this stage the Sufi 'finds' God as he is enraptured in the divine bliss. In Rumi's view, *sama'* is the 'attempt to break the fetters of the body so that the soul is set free.'

The Sufis see the *sama'* as being capable of arousing in the participant a desire for the Beloved, moved by the spirit's desire to return to its heavenly origin. *Sama'* is also seen as an inspiration stirring the heart to truth, being beneficial to him whose heart is alive and whose lower soul is dead.

The foregoing discussion suggests that the purpose of the various exercises has been to attain a closer awareness of God's presence and to induce ecstatic moments in the mystic's life. The Sufi practices range from extreme self-mortification (in the form of lengthy vigils and fasts) to *dhikr*, which inculcates the continuous remembrance of and complete absorption in God. The *sama'* sessions further develop extreme ecstatic states. The underlying motive for all the forms of exercises is to adore God and to establish a mystical relationship with Him. The search for the Divine is accompanied by long and rigorous exercises for internal purification conjoined with continuous remembrance of God. Through *dhikr* and *sama'*, the Sufis obliterate all objects, with only God pervading the mind. It must be noted that nowhere does Sufism give detailed expositions on how the external distractions are to be effaced from the mind. The emphasis lies more on the inculcation of the divine presence in the mind so that everything else is deemed to be unworthy of contemplation and consideration. □

'Noble souls, having divine nature, adore Me with single-mindedness, knowing Me as the immutable source of everything. Always glorifying Me and striving for perfection, these persons of firm dedication adore Me by paying repeated obeisance and being ever endowed with devotion,' says the *Bhagavadgita*.

Adoration in Jainism

DR SHASHI KANT

After serving as Special Secretary to the Government of Uttar Pradesh, Dr Shashi Kant is now the president of the Jyoti Prasad Jain Trust, Lucknow. He was also a long-time editor of Shodhadarsha, a Jain periodical. Dr Shashi Kant is a well-known scholar in Jainism and has contributed a number of articles on aspects of Jain faith. In this article, the author gives us an exact picture of the Jain method of adoration.

Adoration is intense love and reverence for a subject or object. It is equivalent to bhakti, puja, and *vandanā* (obeisance). It is the cornerstone of all religious thinking. It is something that binds people to deity, dogma, or book, as also the adherents of the same faith together in a congregation to shape it into an organized religion or denominational entity.

Bhakti is the emotion, and puja and *vandanā* are its manifestations. Bhakti in its intensity converges on faith (*śraddhā*, *āsthā*, *darśana*), which should be blind to reason (*viveka*, *tarka*, *buddhi*). It presupposes inequality between the devotee and the subject or object of devotion. The devotee submits his or her self to the idol, and invokes the mercy or pleasure of the deity for well being, ie, material or spiritual gain, as a *sakhā* (friend in whom one may confide) or *dāsa* (slave with abject submission) etc. This is universal among all the Indian religious systems, though the terminology may differ. The Semitic systems

appear to be more rigorous as regards faith and organization.

Bhakti, *jñāna*, and karma of the Vedic systems may be equated with *darśana*, *jñāna* and *cāritra* of the Jaina system respectively. The ultimate in the former is

merger into the supreme Being (Brahman) and in the latter it is regaining the nascent Self (*jīva*). Both recognize the eternal existence of the Self and its release from the cycle of transmigration as the summum bonum. In the Jaina terminology, it is mukti (liberation from transmigration), moksha (release from bondage) or nirvana (extinction or extinguishing of the material existence) of the *jīva* (being) to regain its all-luminous nascent pure form which is total consciousness

(*caitanya*) and all joy (ananda). Never to be shackled again, one who has attained this is termed as a *siddha*.

The Jaina philosophy recognizes the duality of *jīva* (being) and *ajīva* (non-being or matter, called *pudgala*). *Jīva* is Atman or con-



From Will Durant, *The Oriental Heritage*, fig. 55

Vimala Sah Temple, Mount Abu



Trisālā dreams about the birth of her son

sciousness, loosely translated as 'soul'. It is bound by matter in the form of karma, which is not just action or act of doing; it is a meta-physical entity which is attracted or not attracted to the *jīva* or Atman and makes it suffer in the *samsara* (cycle of births and deaths). The *jīva* can attain its pure nascent form by casting off the karmic matter which is possible when it is *ṽitarāga*, when it neither has *rāga* nor *dveṣa*, ie, when it is absolutely neutral, neither attracting nor repelling. That is the *mukta* or *siddha* state which is all-joy and all-consciousness. And that is the ultimate object of adoration in Jainism. It is an abstraction which cannot perhaps be cogently and logically expressed but can be experienced in spiritual mysticism beyond words.

In practice, *bhakti* is meant to beg and to get bestowed, as is evident in the Jaina devotional literature—the *stuti*, *stotra*, *stava*, *bhakti*, and *puja* lyrics or hymns composed in Prakrit, Apabhraṁśa, Sanskrit, Hindi, and other regional languages. But this proposition does

not match with the principle that the ultimate Reality can neither be affected by praise nor disaffected by derision, it can neither bestow nor take away. So a mean is struck. There the devotee begs only to revel in the virtues of the idol so as to be inspired to attain that ultimate state. The object of adoration is thus an ideal to emulate.

The ground realities of keeping the flock together or binding together the congregation, however, necessitated a more earthly approach. The masses could not be lured by the abstract or absolute. They wanted deities who could bestow boons, fulfil their desires, and provide solace in distress. Communion also needed middlemen. And the mass craving for the grotesque and picturesque needed to be catered for too. Thus emerged the saintly class, a variegated pantheon and plethora of rituals as means of adoration in Jainism also.

The Jaina religio-social system does not recognize a priestly class. The congregation (*sangha*) has a monastic order consisting of male and female ascetics known as *muni* and *āryikā* and the laity, consisting of male and female followers known as *śrāvaka* and *śravikā*. The extant literature, the earliest of which cannot be dated prior to the Christian era, glorifies the monastic male and enjoins on the laity to sustain the monastic order. The early writers belong to the mo-



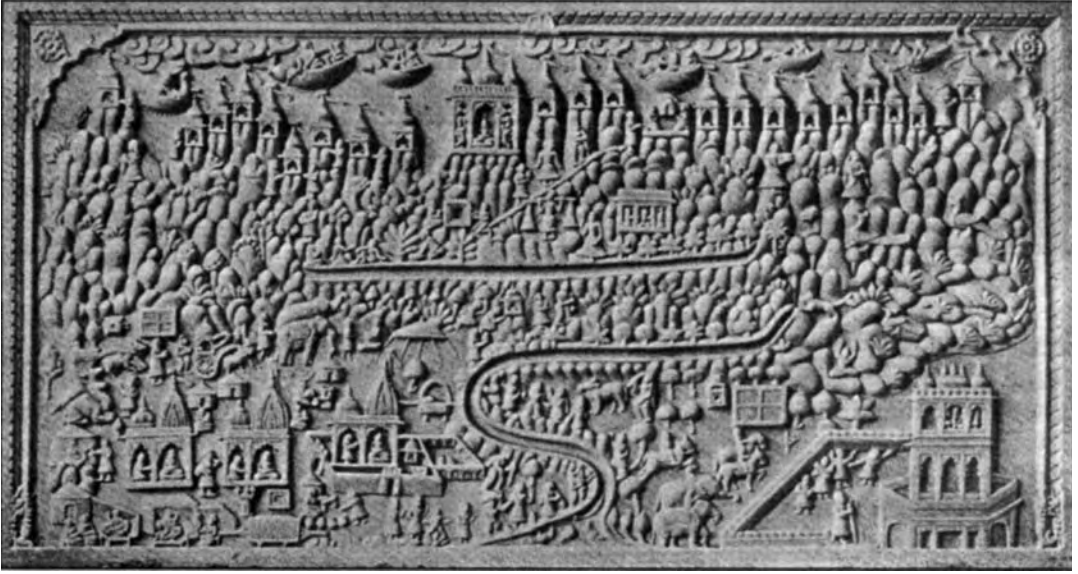
Mahāvīra

nastic order, which alone was the custodian of the *tirthaṅkaras'* teachings; the lay writers wrote only commentaries on the texts or composed devotional lyrics; analytical and critical approach was noticed in modernist scholars during the last century but soon it was counterbalanced by a vast production of literature by the monastics. The monastics have thus made themselves a special class for veneration and adoration among the Jainas of all denominations.

The bhakti or adoration hymns composed in the Prakrit language are attributed to

to the monastic order. Thereafter, *śānti-bhakti*, *samādhi-bhakti*, and *nirvāṇa-bhakti* introduce some patterns for concentration and some motives for keeping up devotion. Lastly, *nandiśvara-bhakti* and *caitya-bhakti* provide for means to sustain devotion by performing some rituals.

Stotra, *stava*, and *stuti*, or the eulogistic lyrics are as much part of Jaina adoration literature as in other Indian systems, and they are contemporaneous too. The more popular are the *Svāyambhū-stotra*, *Kalyāṇamandira-stotra* and *Bhaktāmara-stotra*, marked by melody and



A symbolic representation of a Jaina holy place

Kundakunda of circa 1st century AD, and those in the Sanskrit language are attributed to Pūjyapāda Devānandī of the 5th century. It starts with *siddha-bhakti*, adoration to the ideal abstraction, the summum bonum of all spiritual discipline. Next is *śruta-bhakti* which enjoins to have absolute faith in the word of the scriptures as preached by the *tirthaṅkara*, *arhat*, *kevalin* Mahāvīra, and handed down by the monastics of his order. Then follow *cāritra-bhakti*, *yogi-bhakti*, *ācārya-bhakti*, *pañca-parameṣṭhi-bhakti*, and *tirthaṅkara-bhakti*, which revolve round the theme of reverence

fine composition in chaste Sanskrit, and cutting across the sectarian prejudices.

Arahanta and *siddha* are the primary objects of veneration and adoration in Jainism. The *arahanta*, by precept and example, inspires *jīvas* to follow the path to liberation (moksha). The *siddha* exemplifies the ultimate state, that of the liberated soul. As evidenced by archaeology, in the early stages of Jainism—from a couple of centuries prior to the Christian era down to the 2nd century AD—only the images of the *arahanta* were installed. Later, the *arahanta* was personified as the 24 *tirthaṅkaras*

of the current cycle of time, beginning with Ṛṣabhadeva of the hoary past and ending with Mahāvīra, who was born 2,600 years ago. The *tirthaṅkara* images are identified by the distinguishing symbol on the pedestal, and lately they are also made in different colours. A whole pantheon of attendant deities and complementary and subsidiary deities grew up to cater to the basal cravings of the common people, to whom one could beg and who could bestow reward as well as punishment in folk fancy. It does not have any relevance to the principle and ideal, but it was necessary to keep the flock together, and so all the gods and goddesses and other objects of veneration in different times and climes were absorbed or assimilated so that an adherent may not transgress or wander elsewhere for fulfilling desires.

In the earlier days of Jainism, the recitation of eulogistic lyrics and hymns and the posture of obeisance seem to have been sufficient to manifest adoration. But, gradually, during the last 1000 years or so, the worship ritual grew up and it was elaborated with picturesque ceremonials. Texts were also produced on iconometry and for installation of images in temples. All this has much in common with other Indian systems, yet the wording underlines the distinctive principle. Spots for pilgrimage (*tirtha-yātrā*) were also defined and undertaking of pilgrimage was made an act of piety to ensure cohesion among the adherents. Temples and *sthānakas* where the co-religionists may congregate also serve the purpose of social cohesion. The sadhus (male, muni; female, *āryikā*) pose as the torchbearers and elicit much veneration verging on adoration (notwithstanding the antics in some cases), from the credulous masses, and the reason, therefore, may be that most of the religious literature veers round the theme of sustaining and venerating the sadhu.



Pārśvanātha

To sum up, adoration in Jainism does not, in principle, mean propitiation of some deity but it is to revel in the virtues of, and emulate, the Perfect so as to attain the ultimate. The terminology and wording of the Jaina adoration literature underscores this proposition, and that makes it distinct. In practice and as a mass base, however, it is not very much different from ceremonials and festivities, and is not free from the stranglehold of monastics. The basics of religious life, and thus, of adoration, are the controlling of the senses (*saṁnyama*), the restraining of desires (*tapa*), and the helping of the needy and distressed (*dāna*), and these are universal to all religions, including Jainism. They make us rise above self-gain, sublimating the ego and taking us to a mental plane where we may be more useful to the society at large. If the present is meritorious, the life beyond need not bother us. □

The Jewish Way of Adoration of God

RABBI ANSON LAYTNER

Here's a perceptive presentation of the way one of the oldest religions on earth, Judaism, adores God. Rabbi Anson Laytner has contributed a scholarly article to last year's special number of Prabuddha Bharata (January 2001) also. The rabbi is Director, Multifaith Works, Seattle, USA. He is also the author of Arguing With God (Jason Aronson, 1998).

People often ask me 'Why does God need our prayers of praise and adoration?' In the Jewish tradition, it is not God who needs these things, but rather we do them as part of our efforts to attune our souls and bodies with God.

When we give thanks or praise to God then, ideally speaking, it means that we are consciously articulating an inner awareness of the manifold gifts we receive from the Creator of All. A wholly holy person would not be someone with an episodic sense of wonder; s/he would have a consciousness of God's presence and an attitude of radical gratitude every minute of every day.

However, recognizing that most human beings are unable to attain this exalted state, the rabbis sought to elevate the people's souls at least occasionally, through daily individual blessings and through group worship three times a day. Long ago, the ancient rabbis decreed that a person ought to recite at least one

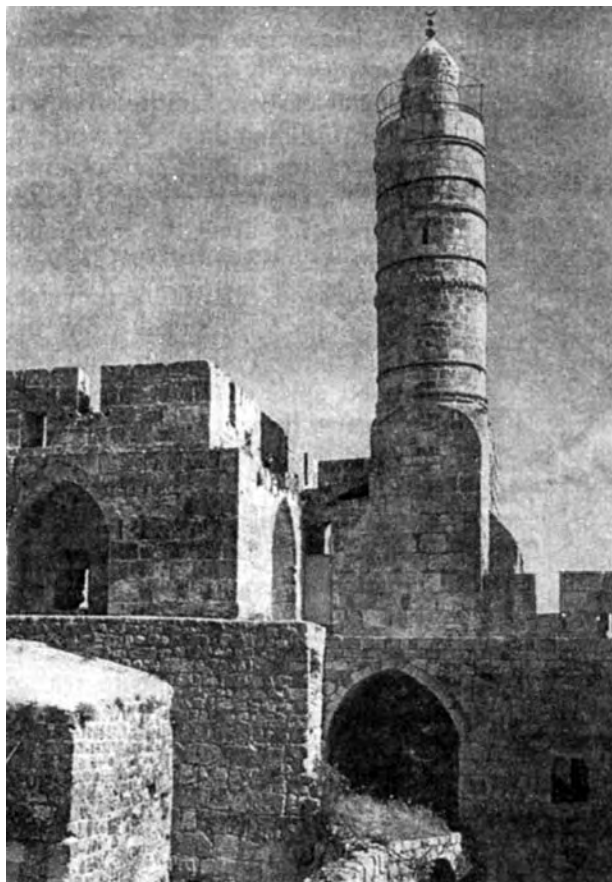
hundred blessings of appreciation each day: for waking from sleep, for the working of our bodies, for our ability to perform God's will, for the Torah and its commandments, for the food we eat and the clothes we wear, for life itself and whatever it may bring. Each of these liturgical blessings begin with the phrase: 'Praised are You, Lord (YHWH) our God, Ruler of the universe.'

Perhaps the pinnacle of the formal adoration of God comes in a part of the Sabbath worship service in a prayer called the 'Kedusha' or sanctification. In this prayer, the congregation as it were joins with the heavenly beings in praise of God, a duet if you will, using the words of the prophet Isaiah: 'Holy, holy, holy, the fullness of the whole earth is His glory' (Isaiah, 6.3).

At the same time as the ancient rabbis were institutionalizing the formal worship service, at least some also recognized the ab-



Ziggurat at Ur. It reminded the nomadic Israelites of the Tower of Babel



David's Tower near Jaffa Gate, Jerusalem

surdity of trying to use human language to praise a Being as mysterious and ineffable as God. In one story in the Talmud, a man improvised on the traditional prayer by adding to God's praise as follows: 'The great, the mighty, the awesome, the glorious, the powerful, the valiant, the fearless, the strong, the sure, and the honored.' Rabbi Chanina waited until he finished and then said to him: 'Are you all through? Why did you stop when you did? Did you finish all the praises of God? Why all these extra words? Even the three words of praise we do say, if Moses had not mentioned them in the Torah...we would not be allowed to recite even these three. Yet you say all this and keep going on and on!'

We simply cannot begin to appreciate God enough and words are not adequate to convey all we might feel. To praise God is, in fact, to belittle God, so it is our effort alone that counts. As Moses told Israel: 'You shall love the Lord (YHWH) your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.' In a famous Hasidic story, an illiterate boy's blowing of his flute as prayer meant more to God than did the beautifully articulated prayers of an entire congregation. What God requires, we are told, is the heart.

While I personally struggle with the inadequacy of words to express feelings to and about God, I am truly aware, at least occasionally, of the gift of life and of the unique potentiality it holds. As I have grown older, life's experiences have sharpened my appreciation of the true fragility of life, and of its unique preciousness and value. In *Wilderness Spirituality*, the Rev Rodney Romney shares a traditional Scottish Christian prayer that I appreciate wholeheartedly: 'Praised are You, God, for the great and mysterious opportunity of my life.'

One does not need a brush with mortality to be reminded of the miracle of life and of life's opportunities. This can be had every moment of every day. There is a Jewish prayer that traditionally is said upon rising each day: 'I am grateful to You, living and enduring God, for restoring my soul to me in compassion. Great is Your faithfulness.' Prayers such as this one work for me because they help me maintain 'right attitude' and 'right perspective'. It reminds me of the fact that whatever I enjoy in life begins simply and most mysteriously with life itself.

The key thing for me is to try to maintain this sense of radical gratefulness as I go about my daily routine. One of the traditional daily prayers reminds me of what 'right mindfulness' should entail: 'We thank You and recount Your praise: for our lives, which are in



Menorah: Multibranch candelabrum used by Jews in rites during the eight-day festival of Hanukka

Your hands; for our souls, which are in Your keeping; for Your wondrous signs that are with us daily; and for your wonderful gifts and goodness at all times, evening, morning, and noon.' If I remember to try, I can uncover a sense of radical wonder and a corresponding need to express radical gratefulness for just about anything, regardless of my situation.

Even when things were at their darkest in my life, I could still find a thing or two for which to be grateful: for life, for love, for time spent together. I was grateful even at those times when I cried from stress and grief. Gratefulness does not necessarily mean happiness. I find it in tears as well as in smiles. Radical gratefulness is a matter of right mind-

fulness—staying in the here and now, focusing, and being aware.

I began this article by stating that traditionally, Jews are supposed to utter at least one hundred 'Praised are You' blessings daily. I'm working on one: calling to mind and acknowledging the source of my daily bread, by expanding upon the traditional blessing. Instead of: 'Praised are You, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth,' I think: 'Praised are you, Yah, our God, spirit of the universe, who has created the soil and the seed, the sun and the rain; who has given us the ability to plant and harvest, to grind flour and make bread, to eat and live, and hopefully to do deeds of loving kindness in your service.' Then I take a bite of bread and chew on all that it really means.

In truth, I often fail to realize how much I take for granted, so to help me stay focused and aware, I've recently taken to muttering another Jewish prayer, one that traditionally is used on holidays and special occasions. I call it a 'centring prayer' because it helps me centre on the preciousness and holiness of any given point in time and be grateful: 'Praised are You, Yah, our God, spirit of the universe, who has given us life, kept us alive, and enabled us to reach this moment.' *It's a start.*

A final comment: As important as collective and private worship is in Jewish tradition, the rabbis also realized that prayer was but one way of serving God, hence Shimon the Righteous taught: 'The world is sustained by three things: the (study of) the Torah, worship, and deeds of loving kindness.' The point is, that for Jews, worship alone does not suffice. It must be married to the study of the Torah and to the practise of good deeds. □

Adoration of a Gursikh

JASBIR KAUR AHUJA

Ms Jasbir Kaur Ahuja is a scholar in Sikhism, and contributes articles from time to time to several important journals, including Prabuddha Bharata. She has translated the Fatehnama and Zafarnama of Sri Guru Gobind Singh into English (both published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan). She has also translated portions of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna into Punjabi. In this brief but interesting article, Ms Ahuja gives a synoptic view of the daily routine of a Sikh.

‘He who is known as a Sikh of the true Guru must rise early at dawn (*amritvelā*), and meditate on the Lord’s Name. With effort, he must attune himself to the Lord and bathe in the pool of the Holy Name (*satsang*) in the early hours of the morning, as advised by the Guru. Thus all his sins and afflictions will be removed. And, after sunrise, he must recite the holy hymns, and reflect on the Lord’s Name while standing or sitting. He who repeats the Lord’s Name with each breath and morsel is a true devotee, and such a devotee wins the grace of the Guru, and is shown the path. Nānak seeks the dust of the feet of such a Gursikh, as he himself remembers God and also makes others remember Him.’¹

Sikh means ‘disciple’. The Punjabi form of the word *sishtya* is *sikh*. The term has become popular for the followers of Guru Nānak (1469-1539), and his

nine spiritual successors.

The basic tenets of Sikhism are, ‘*nām japo, dharam dī kirat karo, wand chako*.’ In the morning, *nām japo*, one should repeat the Lord’s

names. By this, the repetition and recitation of *Gurbāni*, holy hymns from *Sri Guru Granth Sāhib*, are meant. Along with it, there should be the meditation on the Lord’s Names as advised by the Guru. Reading or recitation of the five *bānis* or hymns is imperative in the daily routine of a Gursikh. Which are the five *bānis*? *Japji Sāhib*, *Jāp Sāhib*, *Swaiyas*, *So-dār* and *Kirtan Sohila*. The first two should be sung in the morning, *Swaiyas* and *So-dār* in the evening, and *Kirtan Sohila* at night, before going to bed.

The next tenet is *dharam dī kirat karo*. That is, ‘earn your livelihood by honest means.’ The third and final rule is *wand chako*, to share one’s earnings with the needy and the downtrodden. This tenet also includes 10% contribution of one’s



Sri Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539), the founder of Sikh religion. It is written in Punjabi: ‘*Tera ek nām tare sansār*’

1. *Sri Guru Granth Sāhib*, pp. 305-6.



Sri Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the 10th Guru and founder of Khālsā, a saint-soldier class of citizens

income (*daswand*) for charity and for free community kitchens, called *langars*, where any person from any community, caste, or creed can sit in the same row with others and partake of the same food (*prasād*).

Service to humanity is an important tenet of Sikhism. The ideal of social ethics is an essential feature of the Sikh's daily adoration. The Sikh believes and practises the principle of 'unity in diversity.' The thought of the well-being of all is an essential part of his or her daily prayer. The following hymn is an example of the Sikh's concern for global welfare:

O Lord! The world is in flames,
save it by Thy Grace;
Save it at whatever portal
it can be saved—
The holy precept or
inspiring contemplation

2. *Sri Guru Granth Sāhib*, p. 853.

of the Divine Word;

Nānak says: 'None other than the Lord
can Liberation bestow.'²

In his daily adoration, the Sikh makes no difference between the sacred and the secular, the mundane and the cosmic. The introductory hymn very clearly notifies that 'with each breath and in every activity, the disciple must repeat His name.' Thus secular becomes sacred and mundane becomes spiritual. As for example,

The Sun rises early in the morning
and sets in the evening.
Then the queen of night,
the Moon,
appears at night
accompanied by the twinkling stars.
And the next morning, they recede
and it is the turn of the Sun to rise again.

Thus the cycle goes on....

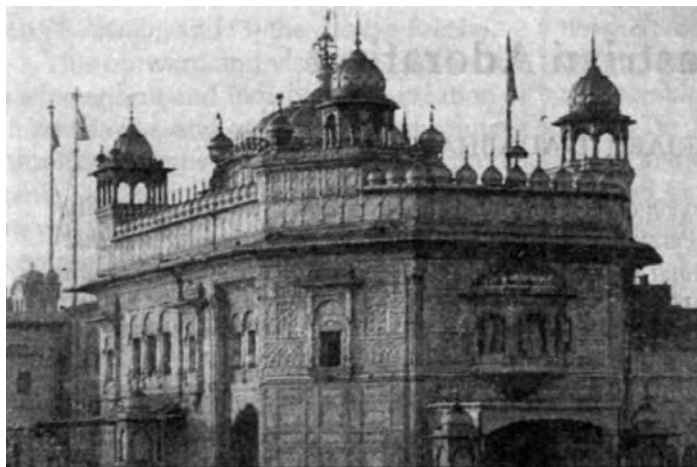
Shall we call this activity sacred or secular? I think it is both. The duties of Sun and Moon shift from one hemisphere to the other for the well-being and fulfilment of the universe. This desire for their welfare makes them sacred though it's all a secular activity.

The founder of Sikhism, Sri Guru Nānak Devji, has clearly said: 'The Truth is supreme, but higher still is truthful living.'³ It's crystal clear from this that stress has been laid on truthful living in practical, daily life. Otherwise, the repetition of the Name of God, thinking of the welfare of others, and doing good deeds become a hypocrisy. Neither inner strength is achieved, nor spiritual heights attained. So truthfulness is a mandatory virtue for a Sikh.

In one of the hymns, Sri Guru Nānak Devji enjoins upon his disciples that if they 'want to play the game of love, they must put their heads on their palms' and come to him.⁴ That is, they must be ready for the greatest sacrifice. They must be ready to take the first step of a strong commitment that they will not hes-

3. *Sri Guru Granth Sāhib*, p. 62.

4. *Sri Guru Granth Sāhib*, p. 1412.



The Golden Temple, Amritsar. Amritsar was founded by the fourth Guru, Rām Dās, and the Golden Temple was built in 1604 by the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev

itate to lay down their lives for the sake of righteousness.

The founder of the Sikh religion thus laid great stress on the quality of self-sacrifice in his disciples for the welfare of humanity. After passing through many struggles, vicissitudes, strifes and tribulations, along with the continuous confrontation with the tyrant Mughal rulers, the tenth and last Guru, Sri Guru Gobind Singhji, organized the Sikhs into the Khālsā, 'the pure', a group of saint-soldiers, and he also prescribed a special uniform for their identity and recognition. This uni-

form should be on the Sikh every day, at all times. The uniform consists of five important elements, namely *kes* (long hair), *kangha* (a comb to keep the hair clean), *karha* (a steel bracelet on the right arm, reminding the determination of the wearer to live and sacrifice one's life for the ideal), *kirpān* (a dagger, an ultimate weapon for the protection of the weak and for self-protection), and *kachcha* (when all other clothes are torn in the battlefield, this cloth will protect the nakedness of the body; it's also a reminder of self-restraint).

Finally, why all this routine? This routine is meant to find one's own real Self, ie, to realize oneself. '*Man tū jyoti svarūp hai, apne mūl pachān*, O Self! Thou art the image of the Divine Light. Realize Yourself!'⁵

Selfless service and the recitation of the Lord's Names with every breath are the accessories for the spiritual upliftment of the soul. So '*sarbat dā bhallā*, may all prosper by the Lord's grace.' □

5. *Sri Guru Granth Sāhib*, p. 441.

What Sort of a Devotee Does the World Need Now?

Be pure and sincere. Pray from your heart: 'Lord, have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me.' The supremely merciful Lord will give you strength, faith and confidence. Be not vain. We are born to learn and there is no limit, no end, to the things to be learned. Let us pray that the Lord may give us good minds and right understanding. Can one become a lover of the Lord just by jumping and shouting 'Hallelujah' or by mouthing quotations from the scriptures? Be humble, be selfless—that's what is more important. This is an age when we need workers who seek no results for their actions—and are completely devoted to God. Not talk, but action; show by the example of your life. We need silent workers. We need preachers who by the example of their lives can silently transform the lives of others.

—Swami Premananda

Zoroastrian Adoration

ERVAD SHERIARJI DADABHAI BHARUCHA

Though the great Iranian religion of ancient times, Zoroastrianism, has lost its vitality and following, except for Indian Parsis and some others around the globe, the practices that this ancient religion teaches are grand and exemplary. We publish excerpts about Zoroastrian adoration from the book, Zoroastrian Religion and Customs (Bombay: Kitab Mahal, 1928), by the author.

Zoroastrian worship consists either of simple oral recitations of portions of the Sacred Word or such recitations combined and accompanied with the performance of ceremonial ritual. These recitals are compositions in the sacred language of the *Avestā*, original or oftener extracted from previous compositions or of a combination of the *Avestā* and Pazend languages. Thanks to the English, Gujarati, French and German translations, anyone interested and inquisitive in the matter may easily acquire swift knowledge of the subject, without the necessity of acquiring a knowledge of the original languages in which the compositions exist, which in its turn is nowadays very rare.

Generally, everyone prays individually by himself, but on several important occasions public worship by the whole congregation is also performed. Of the ancient sacred recitals, the most necessary ones to every Zoroastrian for daily use are those comprised in the '*Nirang-i-kusti*', ie, the prayer about untying and retying the sacred thread *kusti* round the waist on the sacred shirt, *sadrā*. Every Zoroastrian learns this by heart as he has to recite it several times in the day. The rest may be orally recited or read out from the sacred prayer books. The recitals combined with ceremonial ritual are universally done only by the priests, since most of the ritual must be performed by priests.

Some of the rituals can be performed and the necessary accessories handled by the priests alone. Some of these implements are,

baresman, a bundle of about 35 metallic wires according to the different grades of the ritual, tied with a string made of date leaf and held in his left hand by the priest; *hāvana*, a metallic mortar and pestle to pound the *haoma* (Skt: soma) twigs; *tashta* is a metallic saucer with nine holes in the midst to strain the *haoma* juice; cups, dishes, etc, to hold the *haoma* juice. Others there are in which laymen may touch the sacred implements, but they cannot take part in the performance. There are some very few other minor ceremonies which both priests and laymen can equally perform.

It seems that the practice of offering animal sacrifice must have prevailed at sometime or other in ancient Persia. The practice, however, has long since ceased to exist. Offerings of various kinds of food and drink, and of flowers, water, and incense, used by the ancient Iranians, still survive among the Parsis, those principally used in modern times being the juice of the *haoma* plant, milk, sacred bread, ghee, holy water, and dry fragrant wood such as sandalwood, frankincense, etc, which is used for the flame of the fire.

There is no clear or satisfactory evidence of the practice being in vogue of erecting edifices, or fire temples in the time of the *Avestā*, though it is certain that the house-fire was considered sacred and was carefully tended and kept burning alive with dry fuel and other fragrant substances. In later times, however, fire temples seem to have obtained a recognized and strong footing. They are of three grades: (1) the *Atash-e-Dādghāh*, (2) the *Atash-e-Adarān*,

and (3) the *Atash-e-Behrām*.

This outward and visible regard for fire as a beneficent and indispensable creation of Ahura Mazda, and as a potent and salutary natural agent, must have given rise to the misnomer of the Zoroastrians being called fire-worshippers. But it is a gross misconception generated through the ignorance and disregard of the essential and underlying principle that none of the elements, though esteemed as objects of great usefulness, was ever regarded by them as in themselves deities independent of Ahura Mazda, the supreme God, who alone has again and again received the highest veneration as being the sole object of worship and adoration.

The main influence which fire, as the earthly source of light and heat, exercises on the economy of the universe, is sufficient to vindicate the high regard and esteem in which it was held by the ancient Iranians; and though outward veneration for this mighty physical agent may have lent colour and strength to the charge which the ignorance or bigotry of their opponents were not slow to invent, it is an undoubted fact that the charge has invariably been repudiated and denounced by Zoroastrians themselves, and that thoughtful and fair-minded writers of antiquity no less than the learned scholars of modern times have absolved them from the oft-repeated charge, having formed a correct conception of the fanciful grounds on which it was based. Throughout all the sacred writings, the most solemn and emphatic injunction has been laid to worship Ahura Mazda the supreme God and Him alone, and in all times Zoroastrians have in their writings been called *Mazda-yasna*, ie, the worshippers of God Mazda. So though the ancient Iranians esteemed fire as the symbol of divinity and as such worthy of respect and reverence, they never professed themselves as the worshippers of fire. Zoroaster in his own *Gāthās* speaks of fire as a bright and powerful creation of Ahura Mazda and prefers it as a symbol of divinity to idols and other created objects. But nowhere does he enjoin the wor-

ship of fire. On the contrary, he most emphatically enjoins the worship of Ahura Mazda alone. He says: 'Let to Thy fire be offered the salutation of holiness, and not as far as I am able, to that worshipped by Mānya.' Herodotus, while he refers to this reverence of the Iranians for fire, nowhere affirms that they were fire-worshippers. Ferdowsi too bears emphatic testimony on the point and warmly repels the charge of fire worship often hurled against the Zoroastrians. Says he in the *Shāhnāme*, the immortal epic: 'Do not say that they were fire-worshippers; for they were worshippers of God the Holy.'

It is enjoined that a Zoroastrian child between the age of seven and 15 must be invested with *sadrā* and *kusti* which are visible insignia, symbols or emblems, of the Māzda-yasni religion. The *sadrā* is a shirt of white linen with a peculiarly shaped breast-piece called *garebān* attached to the collar on the front side. It must be of white colour, white as indicative of cleanliness and purity serves as the badge of the Māzda-yasni religion. *Kusti* is a peculiar kind of woven band or tape, composed of 72 woollen threads. It is girded three times round the waist with four knots, two in the front and two behind. It is to be laid on the body by day and by night. The three rounds of the *kusti* serve to remind the wearer of the three cardinal virtues of the Zoroastrian religion, viz, *hu-mata* (good thought), *hu-ukhta* (good word) and *hu-varshata* (good deed). The four knots are intended to remind the wearer of his own four distinctive epithets, *Mazda-yasno*, the worshipper of Mazda the only one most wise God; *Zarathushtrish*, the follower of Zoroaster; and *Vi-daevo*, an opponent of the Devas; and *Ahurat-kaesho*, observer of the law of Ahura. The *kusti* must be made of lamb's wool as being symbolical of the meekness and innocence of the animal and reminding the wearer to lead a life of purity and righteousness. The ceremony of the investiture of *sadrā* and *kusti* is called *navzot*, new or first worship, and it is performed by a priest in the presence of other

priests and laymen.

The candidate, who has learnt a few fundamental principles of religion, having purified himself or herself with ceremonial ablution, is presented to the priest, who makes him or her recite three times the Pāzned confession of faith in the presence of those assembled:

Praise be to the good Māzda-yasni religion and to the pure most right Wisdom, created by Ahura Mazda. The good righteous right religion which the Lord has sent to his creatures is that which Zoroaster has brought. The religion is the religion of Zoroaster, the religion of Ahura Mazda given to Zoroaster.

The candidate is from that time duly admitted into the Zoroastrian religion.

The Zoroastrian religion, containing the doctrine of supporting Spento-mainyus or the principle of increase, and of opposing Anglo-mainyus, or the principle of decrease, inculcates marriage as a sacred duty. Zoroaster in his *Gāthās* forcibly enjoins on his own daughter Pouru-chisti and all the rest of his followers never to remain unmarried without valid reasons.

Zoroastrian funeral is something interesting. It being a fundamental principle of the Zoroastrian religion to maintain fire, earth, air, and water pure and undefiled, Parsis neither burn nor bury their dead, nor consign them to water. Their mode of disposing of the dead is to expose them open to the desiccating heat of the sun on the tops of high hills or on raised stony platforms there to be devoured by carnivorous birds—an eminently sanitary mode of annihilating and destroying sources of contagion in the interest of the surrounding living beings.

The religious year of the Zoroastrians professes or ought to be a tropical solar one. It is divided into 12 months of 30 days with five

intercalary days added at the end of the 12th month, thus making in all 365 days in a year. This, however, is not the full tropical solar year, which consists of over 365 days, some five hours, 48 minutes and 48 seconds. Researches have established that, in order to adjust all religious festivals at their proper places, it is necessary to reform the present religious calendar by making up all the intercalations that have been neglected up to now, for the past 1270 years. He advocates an intercalary day at the end of every four years, the *jamshedi navroz*, ie, the vernal equinox, being treated by him as the commencement of the religious year.

The first, the eighth, the 15th and the 23rd days are sacred to Ahura Mazda. They are as if it were the Sabbath days of the Zoroastrians. When the name of a day is identical with that of a month, that day is fixed for a *jashan* or festival, eg, the 19th day of the month Farvardin being named Farvardin. There are six season festivals, called *gahambārs*, each lasting for five days and occurring at unequal intervals, dependent on the variations of the seasons.

The last 10 days of the year constitute the Farvardigān feast, called *muktāt* in Gujarati. They are dedicated to the commemoration of the Fravashis of the holy beings of the past, present, and future times.

The New Year's Day is a great festival in honour of the advent of spring and *rapithvina*, the warm season of the year. A similar festival is observed on the third day, *ardibehesht*, to welcome the entry of *rapithvina*.

On the sixth day of the month of Farvardin falls the *khordādsāl* festival, the birthday of Zoroaster. The 11th day of the month of Dae is a solemn festival, traditionally the anniversary of Zoroaster's death. □

Prophets preach, but the Incarnations like Jesus, Buddha, Ramakrishna, can give religion; one glance, one touch is enough.

—Swami Vivekananda

Adoration According to Patanjali

SWAMI SATYAMAYANANDA

Swami Satyamayanandaji is a young monk of the Ramakrishna Order, and looks after all the Prabuddha Bharata work in Kolkata. He contributes articles to different journals and periodicals from time to time, and also reviews scholarly works. In this absorbing article, he concentrates on latria in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.

The Magic of the Word Yoga

While sightseeing in Canton, China, Swami Vivekananda was bent on visiting a nearby monastery that was off limits to visitors, even when their party's interpreter was trying to dissuade him. Suddenly, they were accosted with a tangible form of dissuasion in the shape of two or three furious club-wielding men who rushed at them with the intent of not just scaring them away. The rest of the party fled for safety. Swamiji caught hold of the interpreter's arm and inquired what was the Chinese equivalent for 'Indian yogi'. Swamiji repeated this loudly. The words instantly acted like magic. The men dropped their clubs and fell at his feet with deep reverence.¹ Truly it can be said that the words 'yoga' and 'yogi' have cast their spell on humankind for thousands and thousands of years. With the present revival and interest in Indian spirituality everywhere, yoga is now influencing more and more minds than ever

before. And the danger of misinterpretations and misrepresentations is not small. Yet the charm persists in whatever form it is in, pure or diluted.

The Most Difficult Thing

Śrī Śāṅkara asks, 'What is the most difficult thing for a man to do?' and answers, 'To keep the mind always under control.'² Even Arjuna complains to Krishna in the *Bhagavadgītā* that controlling the mind is as difficult as controlling the wind. How true it is! Anyone attempting to still the mind, even briefly, is immediately faced with the truth of the impossibility of it. Yet the few brave souls, endowed with faith, energy, memory, concentration and dis-

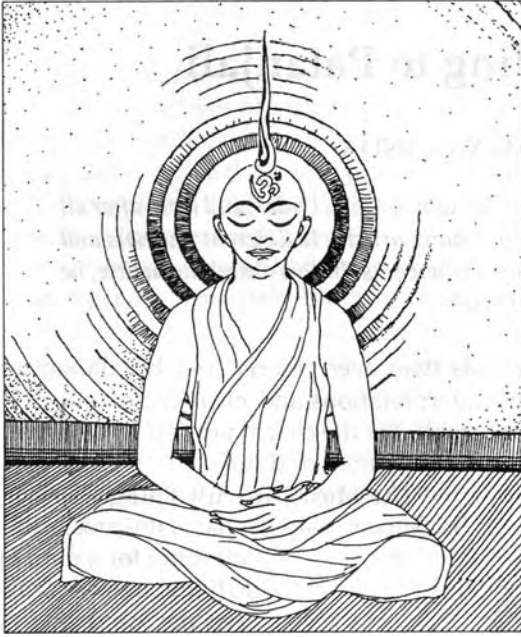


Sage Patanjali: Art by Shubra Nag

crimination, become living testimonies to this great science and are rightly worshipped as gods. India has been the special stronghold of yoga. Every other orthodox and unorthodox *darśana* (philosophy, incorrectly though), in some form or other, has adopted and adapted yogic practices to their systems, for sadhana has always been integral in philosophy or it would have been reduced to mere specula-

1. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1985), Vol. 1, p. 396.

2. *Praśnottara-ratna-mālīkā*, 53.



A yogi in meditation: Art by Swami Aptananda

tion. Patanjali, the great sage, himself is said to be the compiler, systematizer and codifier of certain ancient tested yogic practices prevalent in society then.³ The immense practicality of yoga has made it currently the most popular and respected philosophy.

The Word Yoga

This technical term yoga, like the term samadhi, has been variously interpreted: sometimes novel, sometimes strange, and sometimes bordering on the absurd. The word yoga itself has many definitions but, for our purpose, two meanings need to be looked at. According to the great Sanskrit grammarian Panini, the root *yuj* belonging to the *divādi-gaṇa* means samadhi. The root *yujir* in the *rudādi-gaṇa* means *saṁyoga*, 'yoke' in English. In Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras* the former is meant. So the *Yoga Sūtras* can also be called *Samadhi Sūtras*.

3. Some scholars identify Patanjali with the grammarian, who flourished around 200 BC. Others who do not think so, giving historical and technical reasons say *Yoga Sūtras* must have been written somewhere about 300 AD.

Yoga, based on the ancient Sāṁkhya philosophy, is vast but yet contains only 195 sutras (aphorisms, literally threads) divided into four *pādas*, chapters: 'Samadhi', 'Sadhana', 'Vibhūti' and 'Kaivalya'. There are certain basic concepts that need to be looked at before we can see how the practice of samadhi can be a continuous form of adoration.

The Illustration for Citta-Vṛttis

Picture a sea in the bosom of a long, violent storm. Huge monster waves rise, crest the dark sky, and fall with a deafening roar into the churning waters. Add lightning and sleet for better visual and sound effects. In this heaving sea, a man is struggling for life in a battered boat, which is repeatedly being lifted by waves and crashed in the troughs. Compare this scene for what goes on within: the *citta*, mind-stuff, is the stormy sea; the waves in it are *vṛttis*, and the man in the boat is the effort to still the waves. This is exactly what a novice experiences in the beginning of yoga practice.

Now consider another picture: that of the same sea after the storm has abated. The sky is clear and sunny, and the water luminous and mirror-still. As the yogi puts his whole being into his efforts and is inexorably reaching the end of yoga, this is what his *citta* appears like. The constant fire of tremendous sadhana that goes into subduing each *vṛtti* becomes truly an act of adoration. It is this adoration that helps the yogi stand up and fight even after being knocked down millions and millions of times. Nothing is possible in its absence, and yoga will be an empty word. The yogi takes flowers which can be compared to his yogic experiences and struggles, strings them on the *yoga sūtra* (thread of yoga), and offers this garland to Īśvara, God, who is the special Puruṣa, the first Guru—omniscient and omnipotent—whose manifesting name is the sacred syllable Om.⁴

4. Cf. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 1, pp. 212-8.

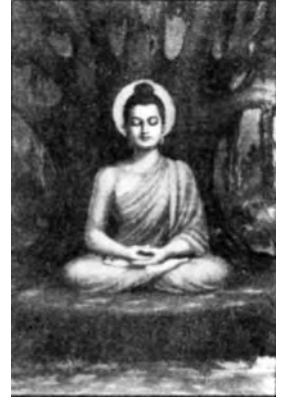
The Ontological Postulates in *Yoga Sūtras*

Yoga philosophy postulates two ultimate realities called *puruṣa*, soul, and *prakṛti*, nature. The former is the *kūṭastha nitya*, suffering no change and the latter is *pariṇāmī nitya*, that which does not lose its specific nature in spite of changes (*yasmin viḥanyamāne tattvaṁ na viḥanyate*). This *prakṛti* is constantly transforming itself due to the actions of the three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*). This transformation embraces all of nature from the microcosm to the macrocosm. *Citta*, being a product of *prakṛti*, is also subject to change. *Prakṛti* is *jada*, insentient, and one. But there is a plurality of *puruṣas* that are by nature pure consciousness. Yoga accepts the external world, the experiencing subject (*bhoktā*), the means of experience and the things experienced as real. In the 'Samadhi Pāda', the second sūtra sets the tone of the whole scheme of things. 'Yogaś-citta-ṛtti-nirodhaḥ, yoga is the restraint (*nirodha*) of *ṛttis* in the *citta*.' Let us look at these words, *yoga*, *citta-ṛtti* and *nirodha*.

Different Stages of Yoga

We have seen that the word *yoga* stands for *samadhi*. Some of the commentators on *Yoga Sūtras* are of the opinion that it means both *saṁprajñāta* and *asaṁprajñāta* *samadhis*. In Patanjali's system, no effort is made to realize the *puruṣa* directly but the quelling of *citta-ṛttis* is attempted wholeheartedly. As a potential marksman first aims at large objects, then proceeds to smaller and smaller ones, so is the aspirant first made to attempt meditation on gross objects and then proceed to subtle ones. *Samadhi* is a much-touted word everywhere; to attain it is indeed very difficult. But in yoga, mere *samadhi* (*saṁādhi mātra*) has not much value. It is, however, the doorway to the higher realm called *saṁprajñāta* *samadhi* in which transcendental knowledge known as *prajñā* is obtained. These advanced stages are technically called *saṁāpattis* (not to be confused with the *saṁāpattis* of Buddhism). *Samāpattis*, simply stated, are the deepening of the constantly practised *saṁādhi mātra* by which the *citta* has attained stability like a clear

piece of crystal, and is merely tinged with the objects presented to it. In *saṁprajñāta* *samadhi* the objects of meditation are categorized as *grāhya*, gross and subtle aspects of the object; the subtle entities are categorized as *grahaṇa*, instruments of knowledge (sense-organs, mind, intellect); and the subtlest as the *grahītā* (the experiencing subject), the 'I'.



The Buddha in meditation

When an object, which is within time, space and causation, is reflected upon, it is *savitarka saṁāpatti*. Higher still is when memory (*smṛti*) is purified, and the object of meditation becomes free from any misconceptions and is unmixed (*asaṅkirṇa*); then the awareness of the transcendental nature of the object beyond time etc shines, and it is *nirvitarka saṁāpatti*. Then comes *savicāra saṁāpatti*, the object now is subtle (*tanmātra*) and is deliberated within time, space and causation. Its higher aspect is when that subtle object is deliberated upon transcending time, space and causation; then it is *nirvicāra saṁāpatti*. Rising still higher and meditating on *citta* as bereft of all impurities of *rajas* and *tamas* becomes *sānanda saṁāpatti*. Going deeper, when there remains only the *sattva* state of the ego and absorption is made on oneself, it is called *sasmita saṁāpatti* (with *asmitā*, ego).⁵ In the highest *saṁprajñāta* *samadhi* there dawns what is known as *ṛtambharā prajñā*, truth-filled transcendental knowledge. With its help the clear distinction between the *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* is known and this is called *viveka-khyāti*.

Establishing oneself in *viveka-khyāti*, there then arises *dharma-megha* ('cloud of dharma') *samadhi*. *Dharma-megha* *samadhi*

5. Swamiji's explanation on *Yoga Sūtras*, 1.17.

gives rise to *para-vairāgya*, supreme detachment from all things related to the three *guṇas* of *prakṛti*. The *citta* still has a residue of impressions so these *saṁprajñāta* states are known as *sabija*, with seeds. After this comes *asaṁprajñāta* samadhi, this is perfect super-consciousness. The strong repeated impressions of *ṛtambharā-prajñā* have obstructed all other subliminal impressions of *vyutthāna* (distractions). *Ṛtambharā-prajñā* itself is checked by supreme control and that leads to the *nirbija* state, without seeds. In this *asaṁprajñāta* samadhi, the *puruṣa* only is there, being neither subject nor object. The door to final liberation, *kaivalya*, is open, and the *citta*, now freed from everything, resolves back to its causes, *pratīprasava*.

From the above we can see to what heights the yogi has to reach. Each stage requires rigorous and unrelenting practice. Speaking about these samadhis seems almost a blasphemy when we realize that to attain even the lowest one might take a long, long time. The yogi very quickly understands what he is up against and this brings in humility, devotion and adoration that will smoothen and sweeten his rough road.

The Citta and Vṛttis

The *citta* is, as we have noted above, insentient, and it is accounted for the difference between pure consciousness and our different states of consciousness. According to yoga philosophy, our consciousness, however, is only possible when a *vṛtti* arises in it. There can be no knowledge or cognition without *vṛttis*. These two then, *citta* and *vṛttis* are inseparable like milk and its whiteness. Broadly speaking, *vṛtti-jñāna* is of two types, *pratyaya* and *prajñā*. The former is ordinary consciousness, and the latter is related to super-consciousness. *Citta* is said to be pervasive, but *vṛttis* are *saṅkoca-vikāsa-śālī*, contracting and expanding, rising and falling, taking the form of the objects presented to it. The process is unimaginably superfast. *Citta* being *prakṛti*'s evolute, it also has the three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Sattva* is characterized by lu-

minosity and is ascribed a white colour. *Rajas* is activity with red colour, and *tamas* is inertia with black colour. These colours or *guṇas* are mixed in varying degrees.

According to the great commentator Vyāsa, there are five *bhūmis*, states, through which *citta* manifests. They are: *kṣipta*, *mūḍha*, *vikṣipta*, *ekāgra* and *niruddha*—scattering, darkening, scattering and gathering alternately, one-pointed, and controlled respectively. Yoga is possible only in the last two. Cognitive *vṛttis* or *pratyayas* are of five kinds: *pramāṇa*, *viparyaya*, *vikalpa*, *nidrā* and *smṛti*—right knowledge, indiscrimination, verbal delusion, sleep and memory respectively. Moreover, there are the five *kliṣṭa vṛttis*, affective (emotional), called 'pain-bearing obstructions': *avidyā*, *asmitā*, *rāga*, *dveṣa*, and *abhiniveśa*—ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, and the fear of death.

These are more lasting than the cognitive ones. *Kliṣṭa vṛttis* manifest only through the cognitive, and the cognitive are impelled by the *kliṣṭa*. It is a kind of constantly revolving wheel.

Each *vṛtti*, after it subsides, leaves a trace called *saṁskāra*, impression, which has the power of producing the original *vṛtti* under circumstances. Because of this there is memory, recognition, etc. The *citta* is supposed to be filled with these traces and they are in the states of: *prasupti*, *tanu*, *vicchinna* and *udāra*, dormant, attenuated, suppressed or repressed and expanded respectively. The *saṁskāras* fall into two broad categories: *karmāśaya* (receptacle of karma) and *jñānāśaya* (receptacle of knowledge). The former, filled with traces of *bhoga vāsanās*, desires, are responsible for rebirth. *Jñānāśaya* by itself does not bind, but in this very fluid situation what is what and where is difficult to posit.

Apart from the above there are the tremendous supernormal powers, *vibhūtis*. Famous among them are the *aṣṭa-siddhis*, the eightfold yogic powers. The *citta* is ultimately destroyed in the state just preceding freedom. In this confusion of different things, let us see

how Swamiji clearly explains it: 'The unknowable furnishes the suggestion that gives the blow to the mind, and the mind gives out the reaction...in the same manner as when a stone thrown into the water, the water is thrown against it in the form of a wave. A book form or an elephant form, or a man form, is not outside; all that we know is our mental reaction from outer suggestions.... You know how pearls are made. A parasite gets inside the shell and causes irritation, and the oyster throws a sort of enamelling round it, and this makes the pearl. The universe of experience is our own enamel, so to say, and the real universe is the parasite serving as a nucleus. The ordinary man will never understand it, because when he tries to do so, he throws out an enamel and sees his own enamel.... Thus you understand what is meant by *citta*. It is the mind-stuff, and *vrittis* and the waves and ripples rising in it when external causes impinge on it. These *vrittis* are our universe.'⁶

Nirodha, Restraint

On reading the above, one gets an impression that controlling *citta-vṛttis* is well nigh impossible. Let us look at it this way. The heart averages about 100,000 beats per day and this goes on for a whole lifetime. Made of tough muscle, does it ever take rest? It does, for a fraction of a second, between the systolic and diastolic beats. Similarly is the case with *citta-vṛttis*, when one rises after taking a form of an object and subsides and a second one is rising, there is a very small interval between them; this has to be prolonged. But before we can do that, we need to raise only one class of *vṛttis* (*sajātiya*) and this slowly holds back the many other classes of *vṛttis* (*vijātiya*). Apart from this method for *citta parikarma*, purification of the mind, there are the *bhāvanās* prescribed to raise *vṛttis* opposed to the inimical ones. They are *maitri*, *karuṇā*, *mudita* and *upekṣā*—friendship, mercy, gladness and indifference with regard to subjects that are happy, unhappy, righteous and unrighteous.

These pacify the *citta*.⁷

The *Yoga Sūtras* has tailored different practices to fit different aspirants who are classed as superior, middling and inferior. The superior are advised *abhāyasa*, *vairāgya* and *īśvara-praṇidhāna*—practice, non-attachment and devotion to God, as principal ones. The middling aspirant is advised *kriyā yoga*: *tapas*, *svadhyaya* and *īśvara-praṇidhāna*—penances, study and devotion to God. The inferior aspirant is advised to take up the *aṣṭāṅga yoga*, or eight-limbed yoga, consisting of: *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*. The first two are great moral and ethical vows, then posture and control of *prāṇa*—these are physical in nature. Then comes withdrawal of the sensory-organs, concentration, meditation and *samādhi*. *īśvara-praṇidhāna* in *aṣṭāṅga yoga* is a part of *niyama*. Technically, *nirodha* is said to be *vṛtti-nirodha*, *pratyaya-nirodha*, *saṁkāra-nirodha*, *kleṣa-nirodha* and *sarva-nirodha*.

The Speciality of Adoration in *Yoga Sūtras*

Adoration or *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, we have noticed, is common to all the three classes of aspirants. Patanjali no doubt has seen its efficacy. Besides, the aspirant needs to understand that unless a higher power is admitted and adored with love, the goal can be extremely difficult. To repeat what we said above, whenever an aspirant struggles to restrain *vṛttis* the very effort becomes an act of adoration by itself. Coupled with love for *īśvara*, the yogi or *yoginī* becomes full of faith, hope, love and gentleness. This constant adoration makes them a blessing to humanity. Even the Lord says in the *Gītā*: 'A yogi is higher than men of penances; he is higher than men of knowledge; the yogi is higher than men of action. Therefore, O Arjuna, do become a yogi. Even among the yogis, he who adores Me with his mind fixed on Me and with faith—he is considered by Me to be the best of the yogis.' □

6. Swamiji's explanation on *Yoga Sūtras*, 1.2.

7. *Yoga Sūtras*, 1.33.

Art as Adoration

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Who else could be the best judge of art than Swami Vivekananda, whose mastery over the world's history, culture, philosophy, spirituality, art, literature, and a thousand other subjects were unparalleled? His grand ideas about art, spread out in the nine volumes of his Complete Works (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama) have been rearranged and presented here. Numbers in parentheses indicate volume and page number of the Complete Works.

Art for Whom?

All the people that work and toil and labour like machines do not really enjoy life, but it is the wise man who enjoys. A rich man buys a picture at a cost of a hundred thousand dollars perhaps, but it is the man who understands art that enjoys it; and if the rich man is without knowledge of art, it is useless to him, he is only the owner. All over the world, it is the wise man who enjoys the happiness of the world. The ignorant man never enjoys; he has to work for others unconsciously (3:20).

History of Art

From a visit to the Louvre Museum in Paris I came to understand the three stages of Greek art. First, there was the Mycenaean art,

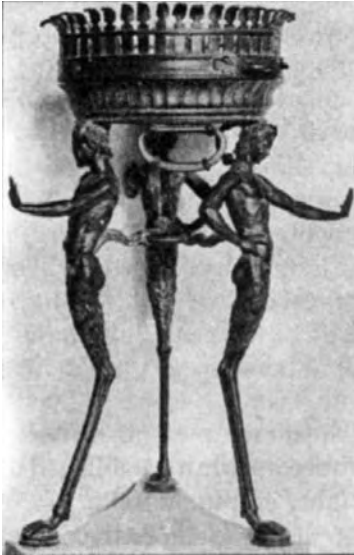
then Greek art proper. The Achaean kingdom had spread its sway over the neighbouring islands and also mastered all the arts that flourished there, being imported from Asia. Thus did art first make its appearance in Greece. From the prehistoric times up to 776 BC was the age of the Mycenaean art. This art principally engaged itself in merely copying Asiatic art. Then from 776 BC to 146 BC was the age of Hellenic or true Greek art. After the destruction of the Achaean Empire by the Dorian race, the Greeks living on the continent and in the Archipelago founded many colonies in Asia. This led to a close conflict between them and Babylon and Egypt, which first gave rise to Greek art. This art in the course of time gave

up its Asiatic tinge and applied itself to an exact imitation of nature. The difference between Greek art and the art of other countries consists in this, that the former faithfully delineates the living phenomena of natural life.

From 776 BC to 475 BC is the age of Archaic Greek art. The figures are yet stiff—not lifelike. The lips are slightly parted, as if always in smiles. In this respect they resemble the works of Egyptian artists. All the statues stand erect on their legs—quite stiff. The hair and beard etc are all carved in regular lines and the clothes in the statues are all wrapped close round the body, in



The painting collection of Louvre Museum, Paris, which completed its 200th anniversary in 1993, is one of the richest in the world, representing all periods of European art up to Impressionism. Seen here is the square court of the Louvre, built by Pierre Lescot under Francis I during 1546-51



Mycenaean art (1000-800 BC): Tripod

death of Alexander the Great. Peloponnesus and Attica were the states where the art of this period flourished most. Athens was the chief city of Attica. A learned French art critic has written: '(Classic) Greek art at its highest development freed itself completely from the fetters of all established canons and became independent. It then recognized the art regulations of no country, nor guided itself according to them. The more we study the fifth century BC, so brilliant in its art development—during which period all the perfect specimens of sculpture were turned out—the more is the idea brought home to our mind that Greek art owed its life and vigour to its cutting loose from the pale of stereotyped rules.' This Classic Greek art had two schools—first, the Attic, and second, the Peloponnesian. In the Attic school, again, there were two different types—the first was the outcome of the genius of the gifted scul-

a jumble—not like flowing dress.

Next to Archaic Greek art comes the age of Classic Greek art—from 475 BC to 323 BC, that is to say, from the hegemony of Athens up to the

tor, Phidias, which a French scholar has described in the following terms: 'A marvel of perfection in beauty and a glorious specimen of pure and sublime ideas, which will never lose their hold upon the human mind.' The masters in the second type of the Attic school were Scopas and Praxiteles. The work of this school was to completely divorce art from religion and keep it restricted to the delineation of merely human life.

The chief exponents of the second or Peloponnesian school of Classic Greek art were Polyclitus and Lysippus. One of these was born in the fifth century BC, and the other in the fourth century BC. They chiefly aimed at laying down the rule that the proportion of the human body must be faithfully reproduced in art.

From 323 BC to 146 BC, that is, from the death of Alexander to the conquest of Attica by the Romans, is the period of decadence in Greek art. One notices in the Greek art of this period an undue attention to gorgeous embellishments, and an attempt to make the statues unusually large in bulk. Then at the time of the Roman occupation of Greece, Greek art contented itself merely by copying the works of previous artists of that country; and the only novelty there was, consisted in reproducing exactly the face of some particular individual (7:402-4).

Ancient Greece, the fountain-head of Western civilisation, sank into oblivion from the pinnacle of her glory, the vast empire of Rome was broken into pieces by the dashing waves of the barbarian invaders—the light of Europe went out; it was at this time that another barbarous race rose out of obscurity in Asia—the Arabs. With extraordinary ra-



Satyr on a copper piece by Praxiteles, 5th century BC.



An ivory box with beautiful carvings



Roman art: Goddess Cybele, also called Agdistis (Aditi of the Vedas), the Graeco-Roman Great Mother of the gods, in her processional cart drawn by two lions

pidity, that Arab tide began to spread over the different parts of the world. Powerful Persia had to kiss the ground before the Arabs and adopt the Mohammedan religion, with the result that the Mussulman religion took quite a new shape; the religion of the Arabs and the civilisation of Persia became intermingled.

With the sword of the Arabs, the Persian civilisation began to disseminate in all directions. That Persian civilisation had been borrowed from ancient Greece and India. From the East and from the West, the waves of Mussulman invaders dashed violently on Europe and, along with them, the light of wis-

dom and civilisation began dispersing the darkness of blind and barbarous Europe. The wisdom, learning, and arts of ancient Greece entered into Italy, overpowered the barbarians, and with their quickening impulse, life began to pul-



Reconstructed altar of Zeus

sate in the dead body of the world-capital of Rome. The pulsation of this new life took a strong and formidable shape in the city of Florence—old Italy began showing signs of new life. This is called the Renaissance, the new birth. But this new birth was for Italy only a rebirth; while for the rest of Europe, it was the first birth. Europe was born in the sixteenth century AD, ie about the time when Akbar, Jehangir, Shahjahan, and other Moghul Emperors firmly established their mighty empire in India.

It is Greece that speaks through everything in Europe.

Every building, every piece of furniture has the impress of Greece upon it; European science and art are nothing but Grecian (3:271).

The secret of Greek art is its imitation of



**Laocoön and his twin sons being bitten by a snake
Sculptor: Agesander (2nd century BC)**



Japanese art: bronze background of the Amida Buddha

nature even to the minutest details; whereas the secret of Indian art is to represent the ideal. The energy of the Greek painter is spent in perhaps painting a piece of flesh, and he is so successful that a dog is deluded into taking it to be a real bit of meat and so goes to bite it. Now, what glory is there in merely imitating nature? Why not place an actual bit of flesh before the dog? The Indian tendency, on the other hand, to represent the ideal, the super-sensual, has become degraded into painting grotesque images (5:258).

Art in Japan

The world has never seen such a patriotic and artistic race as the Japanese, and one special feature about them is this that while in Europe and elsewhere art generally goes with dirt, Japanese art is art *plus* absolute cleanliness. They are great as a nation because of their art. Don't you see they are Asians, as we are? And though we have lost almost everything, yet what we still have is wonderful. The very soul of the Asian is interwoven with art. The Asian never uses a thing unless there be art in it. Don't you know that art is, with us, a part of religion? How greatly is a lady admired, among us, who can nicely paint the floors and walls, on auspicious occasions, with the paste of rice-powder? How great an artist was Shri Ramakrishna himself! (5:475-6).

Art in Europe

What is this Europe? Why are the black, the bronze, the yellow, the red inhabitants of Asia, Africa, and America bent low at the feet of the Europeans? Why are they the sole rulers in this Kali-Yuga? To understand this Europe one has to understand her through France, the fountain-head of everything that is highest in the West. Paris is the centre of Western civilisation. This Paris is like a vast ocean, in which there is many a precious gem, coral, and pearl, and in which, again, there are sharks and other rapacious sea-animals as well. The palatial structures, the gardens resembling Indra's paradise, the groves, even the farmer's fields—everywhere and in everything there is an attempt at beauty, an attempt at art, remarkable and effected with success, too (5:507-8).

(‘The English art is also good, is it not?’) What a stupid fool you are! But what is the use of blaming you when that seems to be the prevailing way of thinking! Alas, to such a state is our country reduced! The people will look upon their own gold as brass, while the brass of the foreigner is gold to them! This is, indeed, the magic wrought by modern education! Know that since the time the Europeans have come into contact with Asia, they are trying to infuse art into their own life. Look at their buildings—how commonplace, how meaningless, they are! (5:373).

Now, go all over our motherland and see if you cannot read aright, from their very appearance, the meaning for which our buildings stand, and how much art there is in them! The glass is their drinking vessel, and ours is the metal Ghati (pitcher-shaped); which of the two is artistic? Have you seen the farmers' homes in our villages? Have you seen their granaries for keeping paddy? What an art is there in them! What a variety of paintings even on their mud walls! And then, if you go and see how the lower classes live in the West, you would at once mark the difference.



European jug (left) and Indian ghaṭī (right)

Their ideal is utility, ours art. The Westerner looks for utility in everything, whereas with us art is everywhere. With the Western education, those beautiful Ghatīs of ours have been discarded, and enamel glasses have usurped their place in our homes! Thus the ideal of utility has been imbibed by us to such an extent as to make it look little short of the ridiculous. Now what we need is the combination of art and utility. Japan has done that very quickly, and so she has advanced by giant strides. Now, in their turn, the Japanese are going to teach the Westerners (5:372-5). As regards ourselves, we need not go in for collecting works of art as they [the other races] do; but should we, or should we not, at least preserve those which we possess from going to ruin? (5:476).

The thing most worth seeing in Vienna [it has long been a centre of the arts, especially music; Mozart, Beethoven, and the Strauss family were among the great composers who lived and worked there] is the Museum, specially the Scientific Museum, an institution of great benefit to the student. There is a fine collection of the skeletons of various species of ancient extinct animals. In the Art Gallery, paintings by Dutch artists form the major portion. In the Dutch school, there is very little attempt at suggestiveness; this school is famous



Masterpiece of Indian sculpture: the dome of a Jain temple, Mount Abu

for its exact copy of natural objects and creatures. One artist has spent years over the drawing of a basketful of fish, or a lump of flesh, or a tumbler of water—and that fish, or flesh, or water in the tumbler is wonderful. But the female figures of the Dutch school look just like athletes (7:389-90).

The Antiquity of Indian Art

When the real history of India will be unearthed, it will be proved that, as in matters of religion, so in fine arts, India is the primal Guru of the whole world (5:421). Amongst all races of the world, from the earliest time in history, India has been called the land of wisdom. In India, music was developed to the full seven notes, even to half and quarter notes, ages ago. India led in music, also in drama and sculpture (4:196).

I was mistaken that sculpturing of the human figure was not developed in India as among the Greeks. I am reading in Fergusson and other authorities that in Orissa or Jagannath, which I did not visit, there are

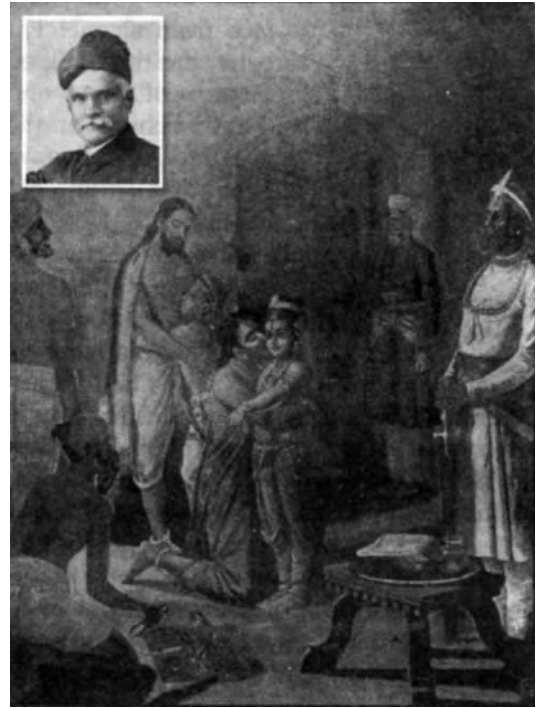


Brahma (10th century)

among the ruins human figures which for beauty and anatomical skill would compare with any production of the Greeks. There is a colossal figure of Death, a huge female skeleton covered with a shrivelled skin—the awful fidelity to anatomical details are frighten-

ing and disgusting. Says my author [Fergusson], one of the female figures in the niche is exactly like the Venus de Medici and so on. But you must remember that everything almost has been destroyed by the iconoclastic Mohammedan, yet the remnants are more than all European debris put together! I have travelled eight years and not seen many of the masterpieces. There is a ruined temple in a forest in India which and the Parthenon of Greece Fergusson considers as the climax of architectural art—each of its type—the one of conception, the other of conception and detail (8:395-96).

I had the opportunity of seeing the beauties of art of nearly every civilised country in the world, but I saw nothing like the development of art which took place in our country during the Buddhistic period. During the re-



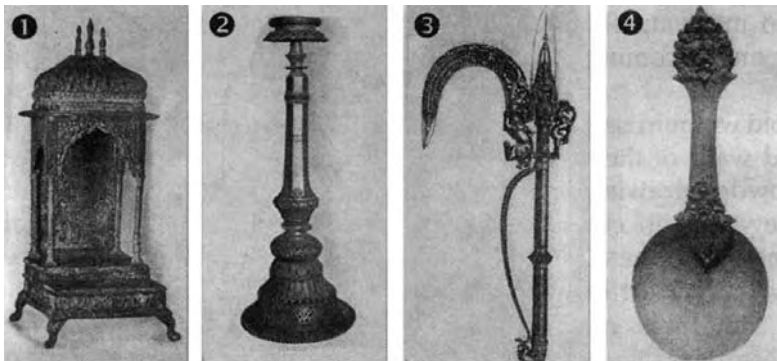
Krishna releases his parents from prison

Painting by Ravi Varma (inset)

gime of the Mogul Emperors also, there was a marked development of art—and the Taj and the Jumma Masjid etc are standing monuments of that culture (7:201).

It will take up a long time yet to become as good and efficient as they are in the arts of painting and sculpture. We were never very skillful in those two departments of art. By im-

itating the Europeans we at the utmost can only produce one or two Ravi Varmas among us! But far better than such artists are our Patuas (painters) who do the Chalchitras of our goddesses, in Bengal. They display in their work at least a boldness in the brilliancy of their colours. The paintings of Ravi Varma and others



Indian metallic art between 10th and 14th centuries:

(1) shrine (2) lamp (3) goad (4) spoon



18th century rural art in
India: Bidri vase

make one hide one's face from shame! Far better are those gilded pictures of Jaipur and the Chalchitra of the goddess Durga that we have had from old times (5:475-6).

Difference between Indian and Western art

The Anglo- Saxon people have always been badly fitted for art. They have good poetry—for instance, how wonderful is the blank verse of Shakespeare! (4: 196). The grace of both Lakshmi (goddess of fortune) and Sarasvati (goddess of learning) now shines on the peoples of the Western countries. They do not stop at the mere acquisition of the objects of enjoyment, but in all their actions they seek for a sort of beauty and grace. In eating and drinking, in their homes and surroundings, in everything, they want to see all-round elegance. We also had that trait once—when there was wealth and prosperity in the land. We have now too much poverty, but, to make matters worse, we are courting our ruin in two ways—namely, we are throwing away what we have as our own, and labouring in vain to make others' ideals and habits ours. Those ancient religious rites, practices, studies, etc, that were left to us, you are consigning to the tide-waters to be swept away—and yet something new and suitable to the exigencies of the time, to make up for them, is not striking its roots and becoming stable with us (5:475).

In the days gone by, our old women used to paint the floors, doors, and walls of their houses with a paste of rice-powder, drawing various beautiful figures; they used to cut plantain leaves in an artistic manner, to serve the food on; they used to lavish their art in nicely arranging the different comestibles on the plates. Those arts, in these days, have gradually disappeared or are doing so (5:475-6). Of course new things have to be learnt, have to be

introduced and worked out; but is that to be done by sweeping away all that is old, just because it is old? What new things have you learnt? Not any—save and except a jumble of words! What really useful science or art have you acquired? Go, and see, even now in the distant villages, the old woodwork and brick-work. The carpenters of your towns cannot even turn out a decent pair of doors. Whether they are made for a hut or a mansion is hard to make out! They are only good at buying foreign tools, as if that is all of carpentry! Alas! That state of things has come upon all matters in our country! (5:475-6). We are awfully behindhand in art especially in that of painting (5:109). Whatever is done now is merely an attempt at imitation. Everything now in India hinges on the question of how little a man requires to live upon (4:197).

I wish it so much that you should go for a few hours to a few villages west of Calcutta to see the old Bengali structures made of wood, cane, mica, and grass. These are the bunga-



An artistic door of an Indian village temple



Worship of Dharmachakra: an image from
the Mauryan Age

lows, most artistic. Alas! the name is travestied nowadays by every pigsty appropriating the name. In old days a man who built a palace still built a bungalow for the reception of guests. The art is dying out (5:173-4).

(‘What difference did you find between the art of the West and that of India?’) It is nearly the same everywhere. Originality is rarely found. In those countries pictures are painted with the help of models obtained by photographing various objects. But no sooner does one take the help of machinery than all originality vanishes—one cannot give expression to one’s ideas. The ancient artists used to evolve original ideas from their brains and try to express them in their paintings. Now the picture being a likeness of photographs, the power of originality and the attempt to de-

velop are getting scarce (7:202).

People who are very materialistic take nature as their ideal, and try to express in art ideas allied thereto, while the people whose ideal is the transcendent Reality beyond nature try to express that in art through the powers of nature. With regard to the former class of people, nature is the primary basis of art, while with the second class, ideality is the principal motive of artistic development.

Thus, though starting with two different ideals in art, they have advanced in it each in its own way. Seeing some paintings in the West you will mistake them for real natural objects. With respect to this country also, when in ancient times sculpture attained a high degree of perfection, if you look at a statue of the period it will make you forget the material world and transport you to a new ideal world. As in Western countries paintings like those of former times are not produced now, so in our country also, attempts to give expression to original ideas in art are no longer seen. It would be well if you try to paint the objects of everyday meditation of the Hindus by giving in them the expression of ancient ideals (7:203).

Take, for instance, the figure of Mother Kali. In it there is the union of the blissful and the terrible aspects. But in none of the pictures can be seen the true expression of these two aspects. Far from this, there is no attempt to express adequately even one of these two aspects!

I have tried to put down some ideas of the terrible aspects of Mother Kali in my English poem, *Kali the Mother*. Can you express



An Indian metallic teapot



Shiva: Art by Manishi Dey

those ideas in a picture? (7:203). In art, interest must be centred on the principal theme. To paint a scene, if one thing be painted, it is easy enough; but to paint different things and yet to keep up the central interest is very difficult (7:407).

What is True Art?

Now, true Art can be compared to a lily which springs from the ground, takes its nourishment from the ground, is in touch with the ground, and yet is quite high above it. So Art must be in touch with nature — and wherever that touch is gone, Art degenerates — yet it must be above nature. Art is, representing the beautiful. There must be Art in everything. The difference between architecture and building is that the former expresses an idea, while the latter is merely a structure built on economical principles. The value of matter depends solely on its capacities of expressing *ideas*. The artistic faculty was highly developed in our Lord, Shri Ramakrishna, and he used to say that without this faculty none can be truly spiritual (5:258-9).

The Aryan first began with the soul. So the inquiry in the Vedas was always through the soul. The Aryan man was always seeking divinity inside his own self. It became, in course of time, natural, characteristic. It is remarkable in their art and in their commonest dealings. Even at the present time, if we take a European picture of a man in a religious attitude, the painter always makes his subject point his eyes upwards, looking outside of nature for God, looking up into the skies. In In-

dia, on the other hand, the religious attitude is always presented by making the subject close his eyes. He is, as it were, looking inward (6:3-4). What religion can paint a heaven which is not like this earth? And it is all art, only this art is being made known to us gradually. We, with five senses, look upon this world and find it gross, having colour, form, sound, and the like. Suppose I develop an electric sense—all will change (8:128-9).

I think, the practice of meditation even with some trifling external object leads to mental concentration. This is the reason why we have in this country so much worship of the images of gods and goddesses. And what wonderful art developed from such worship! (6:486).

Art has its origin in the expression of some idea in whatever man produces. Where there is no expression of idea, however much there may be a display of colours and so on, it cannot be styled as true art. Even the articles of everyday use, such as water vessels, or cups and saucers, should be used to express an idea. In the Paris Exhibition I saw a wonderful figure carved in marble. In explanation of the figure, the following words were inscribed underneath: Art unveiling Nature. That is how art sees the inner beauty of nature by drawing away with its own hands the covering veils. You should also try to produce something original like this. If you can with your whole heart produce one real thing, if you can rightly express a single idea in art, it must win appreciation in course of time. A real thing never suffers from want of appreciation in this world. It is also heard that some artists have gained appreciation for their works a thousand years after their death! (7:200-1).

It is my opinion that Shri Ramakrishna was born to vivify all branches of art and culture in this country. Therefore this Math has to be built up in such a way that religion, work, learning, Jnana, and Bhakti may spread over the world from this centre. Be you my helpers in this work (7:204). □

Music as the Adoration of the Divine

APARNA CHAKRABORTY

Smt Aparna Chakraborty is a famous exponent of Hindustani classical music. She has participated in a number of music conferences both at the national as well as international levels. She is also a music critic, apart from being a regular contributor to different magazines and journals. Here are Smt Chakraborty's excellent thoughts about how music can be transformed into the worship of the Divine.

नाहं तिष्ठामि वैकुण्ठे
योगिनां हृदये न च ।
मद्भक्ता यत्र गायन्ति
तत्र तिष्ठामि नारद ॥

*Nāhaṁ tiṣṭhāmi vaikunṭhe
yogināṁ hṛdaye na ca;
Madbhaktā yatra gāyanti
tatra tiṣṭhāmi nārada.*

You don't find Me in Vaikuṇṭha nor in the yogi's heart. Wherever My devotees sing My glories, there I am present.

Music occupies a very high place among the performing arts, rather, in art itself. It transcends all barriers of caste and creed, of latitude and longitude, of language and expression. The very system of music has come from the goddess of learning, Sarasvatī. The goddess of learning has a *vīṇā* in her hands, which is one of the oldest instruments of Indian classical music. *Nāda* or the musical sound is perhaps the surest way to reach the Almighty, and the easiest. Easiest because it does not involve any penance or fasting, rituals or ceremonies, dictas or formulas.

All sentient beings respond to music. Birds sing, rivers make a beautiful sound, and there is music in the various manifestations of nature. There is also a rhythm: in the ripples of water, in the rustling of leaves, in the motion of waves. Atul Prasad Sen, a lawyer, a composer and a singer rolled into one, says:

*Probhāte jārey bonde pākhi
kon bhorōśāy tāhāre dāki*

Birds salute the Maker by instinct alone, while humans hesitate to do so because of

their 'wiser natures'. But there is a craving in the human heart to reach out to the Unseen, to view the Invisible, to attain the Highest. The path seems very difficult, the road winding uphill all the way—a path with so many checkpoints like argument, syllogism, line-by-line analyses of holy texts, etc. But, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, *bhakti* is the easiest path to the Almighty and music opens up



Sarasvatī, the mother of all art and learning



An ordinary fakir's music thrills an emperor

the hidden springs of bhakti in the human heart by the power of *nāda*.

Music is part of religious ceremonies in all the religions of the world. There is music from the birth of a human being till his death. Music is for joyful occasions as well as for mourning. From very ancient times, *gītis* or *gāthās* were sung on the occasions of ceremonies and festivals. They say the origins of music could be traced to the *Sāma Veda*, where we find sages intoning Vedic mantras in beautiful and resonant music. The *udāṭṭa*, *anudāṭṭa*, and *svarita* of the Vedic recitations were different in pitch and tone but one in harmony and rhythm. The two main constituents of music, *svara* and *tāla*, are apparent in the chants.

It is not a mere coincidence that music is

inextricably bound up with churches and temples. Its appeal is instantaneous. Abstruse philosophical truths become simple when rendered with music. An unlettered *bāul* (wandering minstrel) can sing with ease: '*Bono phūle mono phūle sājābo tomāy*, I shall adore you with wild flowers and mind's flowers.'

There's nothing like music to help concentration. More than *prāṇāyāma* and other yogic exercises, it is music that has greater potency for controlling a wavering mind. For ordinary mortals like us, music serves as a hand-maiden of God. By calling it *nāda-brahma*, it has been identified with the Highest. Beautiful hymns have been composed and sung in churches all over the world. A choir is a part of prayers in churches. Similarly, in temples, *bhajans* and *kirtans* etc are part of worship. The Sufi saints such as Nizāmuddin A'ulia and Sheikh Saleem Chishti favoured the qawwali form of music which is a means of gaining *ibādat* or the gr

ace of God.

Music is the medium which embraces all, be they learned or ignorant, rich or poor. No trappings are required, no fanfare. Learned discourses do not move one's heart but music is the grist



Mother Sarasvati



A baul singer in ecstasy

of all mills.

The avatars have come down to us in various forms. Why do we adore them? We adore them because they are the direct representations of God. They provide windows for us to see the supreme Being. In the avatar, we find the greatest manifestation of the Divine and so we worship him in numerous ways. Religions, mythologies, cultures, etc grow up around the avatars. And numerous saints come, sing His praises, compose songs, and thus the field of music is enriched. Among the avatars, we know that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was an ardent lover of music. Caitanya was an embodiment of *kīrtan*. Though Rāma's love for music is not mentioned, that of Sri Ramakrishna is too evident to be missed by anyone. Not only was he himself a great singer, but Ramakrishna also encouraged *kīrtans* and other forms of singing with enthusiasm, as he would say that they

lead one to God.

One of the enduring factors of Indian music are the compositions of saints. So many saints have been born on this blessed land, so many songs have been composed here, and so many singers have been singing them with devotion down the ages, that it's impossible to make a list of all of them. However, in recent times, we had Mirābāi, the doyenne of Kṛṣṇa bhakti, who is inspiring devotion in countless hearts through her songs of *viraha* and *milana*. Then there are saint-poets like Tulsidās, Sūrdās (he was one of the *aṣṭa chāp* poets of Vallabha, who sang at the Śrīnāthji Temple), the Maharashtrian saints, the south Indian saints, and so on. A particular form of Bengali devotional songs is called *Śyāmā Saṅgīt*, songs in adoration of the Divine Mother. Many saints were born in Bengal, who worshipped the Divine Mother in Her Kālī form or Durgā form through song. Of them, Kamalākānta, Rāmprasād and some others are well known. Just as Tulsidās's *Rāmcaritmānas* is famous all over the north of India, the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Kṛttivāsa is famous in Bengal. There are sev-



A Bengali baul singer: Art by Swami Aptananda



In the world of music: Art by Probhat Niyogi

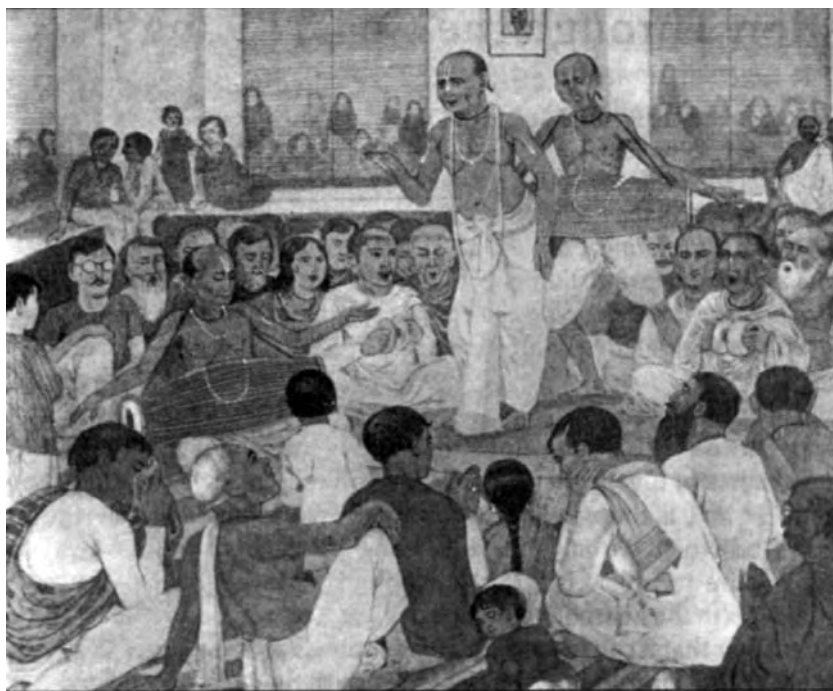
eral other *Rāmāyaṇas* in India. So with the great epic *Mahābhārata*, though not to the extent of the other. The universality and spontaneity of music have helped keep these great epics alive. And the Almighty has become part of our households.

The *dhruvapada* or *dhrupad* music in the north Indian system, and the *kṛtis* or *kirtanas* in the south Indian style can be said to be the noblest forms of music extant today. The alap or elaboration of a raga [raga in Indian music is a pattern of notes having characteristic intervals, rhythms, and embellishments, used as a basis for improvisation] and adding *svaras* are an overwhelming part of *dhrupad* singing. In Hindustani music, the *dhru pads* were composed either in praise of God or on the beauties of nature. Especially the music of south India, called Carnatic music, had only one aim since ancient times: to please the Lord. Though that form of music appears to concen-

trate more on verbal expressions than on the development of ragas by way of alap, etc, we must remember that almost all of the south Indian composers were ardent devotees, inebriated with the love of God. Tyāgarāja, Muttusvāmi Dikṣitar, Svāti Tirunāl Mahārājā, and Śyāma Śāstri were great devotees of God. They considered pleasing the Lord through music in temples and other places of worship was the way and not pleasing kings through their music. There are so many stories told of singer-saints, who would experience the presence of the deities of different ragas when they sang them.

Though north Indian music came down the same lane, it had to deviate to some extent when it began to show interest in pleasing the kings and rulers more than it did the Lord. The present form of Hindustani classical music, as we know it today, can be traced to Miān Tānsen, of the court of Emperor Akbar, in the 16th century. From his progeny, Tantarang Khān and Bilās Khān, emerged the *bīnkars* and vocalists; and from his daughter, the *rabābis* and *sītārīs*. Sarasvatī, Tānsen's daughter, was an accomplished musician. She was married to Misri Singh, later known as Nabat Khān when he embraced Islām. About 200 *dhru pads* of Tānsen were given to Misri Singh as dowry. The khayal [a traditional type of song, typically having two main themes], which is the most popular music-form today, lost its dignity and purity due to unfavourable circumstances. The musicians of the Mughal court faced an unstable future after the breakup of the Mughal empire. They sought and received the patronage of kings and nawabs. Sychophantic eulogies replaced the hymns to God to a great extent. With exceptions, musicians became fidus Achates of their patrons rather than messengers of God. Commenting on this, Swami Vivekananda says:

What real music we have lies in Kirtana and Dhrupada; the rest has been spoiled by being modulated according to the Islamic methods.



A modern-day kirtan scene: Art by Purnachandra Chakraborty

śāstrīya or classical music) is of a bewildering variety. It is spontaneous, and gives vent to all the joys and sorrows that comprise one's life on this planet. Its tunes are simplistic. *Mārga Saṅgīt* has its roots in *deśī* tunes. When music in our country assumed a recognizable form, the raga emerged from *dhun*, which is just a melodic line. Down the ages, raga became highly specialized and systematized. The *rāga-rūpa* or structure of melody underwent many

Do you think that singing the short and light airs of Tappa songs in a nasal voice and flitting like lightning from one note to another by fits and starts are the best things in the world of music? Not so. Unless each note is given full play in every scale, all the science of music is marred. ... Our music had been improving steadily. But when the Mohammedans came, they took possession of it in such a way that the tree of music could grow no further. The music of the Westerners is much advanced. They have the sentiment of pathos as well as of heroism in their music, which is as it should be. But our antique musical instrument made from the gourd has been improved no further' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 363).

Such was the tradition of Hindustani music. But, on the whole, both the Indian forms of music are centred around God, and the science itself is such that by the practise of music, one can attain the Supreme.

Folk music (*deśī* or *mārga*, as opposed to

changes, and many forms of music evolved as are extant today. As no art is static, changes are bound to appear. But the ultimate aim of music, which is pleasing the supreme Being, has not changed. Swami Vivekananda says: 'Music is the highest art and, to those who understand, is the highest worship' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 125).

Music, to be a step to attain the Lord, must be devoid of all worldly ambitions. Even if the story of Swami Haridas's refusal of the largesse offered by Emperor Akbar is apocryphal, it is a cogent reminder for all aspiring musicians that one cannot worship both God and mammon.

Milton called fame 'the last infirmity of the noble mind.' How much more luring are the temptations for us poor mortals today, to collect money and fame while the going is good! Not for such of us are the flutter of the angels' wings, the voices that Joan of Arc heard, or the flute of Lord Kṛṣṇa. □

Adoration Through the Gospel Songs

DR SUMITA ROY

Dr Sumita Roy is Associate Professor of English at Osmania University, Hyderabad. A well-known Ramakrishna-Vivekananda scholar, Dr Roy has been contributing articles to different important journals, including Prabuddha Bharata. She is also known for her lectures on linguistic and philosophical themes. Dr Roy reviews books for Prabuddha Bharata regularly. In this article, she chooses a novel theme for study: the way God has been adored through song in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

The inimitable Bard of Avon had said: 'If music be the food of love/ Play on.' Yes, music is the support and sustenance of love, and what better, higher and purer love is there in the world than the love of God which we call devotion. An endless exposure to music is sure to foster/nurture devotion in the heart of the believer. One can say further that it can instil devotion in the most sceptical of minds. Such is the power of music that it touches and transforms one and all.

Legend has it that great musicians were capable of moving animals and plants to an appreciation of music and thus tame wild nature. Music is such a confluence of sounds which reflects the harmony inherent in all creation. Music is the symbol of the divine order which permeates the whole cosmos. Music brings the mind to an appreciation of the mysteries of the universe.

Music is that faculty of the human mind and sensibility that elevates a normal person to the level of a saint. The abstruse doctrines of spirituality that cannot be clearly enunciated in mere words or prosaic language take on an urgency and immediacy when put in the form of a song/poem. It is no wonder that great seers have translated their vision into music rather than restricting it to verbal discourses. The lofty flight of the mystic vision can best be depicted through music. In other words, music has the power of communicating at a level where other modes of communication have not yet reached.

Music concentrates the mind and leads it inward which is the seat of spiritual progress according to all religions. The outer clamour of the mundane world often deafens the materialistic being and keeps him/her away from this satisfying rhythm of inner cadence without which life is a barren desert. The most desperate or deeply depressed states of mind can be lightened with the help of music.

Sri Ramakrishna in his *Gospel* [*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*] says again and again that 'singing the name and glories of God' is one of the easiest ways of reaching the goal of life, that is, realization. No other mode is as simple, as pleasurable and melodious as the path of music for inner transformation. In the immortal words of the Master: 'One gradually acquires love of God through the practice of chanting God's name and glories. (To M.) One should not be ashamed of chanting God's holy name' (*Gospel*, p. 13). Here, Sri Ramakrishna is raising two important issues: the need to use the practice of music as a means to acquiring devotion and the usual feeling of reluctance to do so by the beginner on the path. Though many appreciate music passively, the Master is stressing here the need for a more active participation. He would sing constantly and also encourage others to do the same. He said that loud articulation of music through the lips purified the entire being, making it fit for devotion.

It is no wonder that the *Gospel* is full of songs, interspersing the highest discussions



**Sri Ramakrishna,
the personification of divine love and bliss**

on spirituality. Just by reading about the ecstasy into which Ramakrishna entered on hearing/singing songs is an elevating experience. Deep emotions are also evoked by the singing of songs. The Master often had tears in his eyes when he heard a moving song. It is common knowledge that the mind given over to rationality or proud of its logical clarity is often ashamed of emotions. Then the inward being becomes so dry that the most significant aspects of human life stay out of the ken of such a mind. Even Aristotle spoke about this when he suggested the elevating nature of dramatic performances. So, emotions need to be experiences, evoked and handled to have a balanced personality rather than suppressed and ending up with problems of the mind and psyche. In our swift-moving world of today mental discord is a common phenomenon and music does much to relieve the tensions and travails of our everyday existence.

A song is the signature of a personality that is capable of devotion. A love for music is

a guarantee of a genuine human being. A person can be tested by the way in which he/she responds to music. We recall that at the first historic meeting of the great Master and his unique disciple, Vivekananda sang the poignant song, 'Oh mind, let us go to our own abode' (*Mono cholo nijo nicketone*).

The sentiments expressed through music are better received than numerous discourses can often be. The mind is eminently suited to receive such deep thoughts and ideas because music prepares the ground of the mind to be receptive. A deep intuition develops in such a mind and it is capable of looking at the ordinary happenings of life with an extraordinary insight. For instance, to a person who has had some experience of inwardness, the definitions of the worldly-minded seem to differ from his/her conceptions. The song: Is my Mother Shyama black? (*Śyāmā mā ki āmār kālō re*)

People call her so,
but my mind sees her differently
is a point to be noted in this context.



**Vivekananda, the musician, whose songs would
instantly transport Ramakrishna into samadhi**



Rāmprasād adoring Mother Kālī

Ramakrishna said about this song that as the aspirant goes closer to the Divine, the perception changes and, therefore, the colour black appears different. Symbolically, this would mean that through the eyes of true love, deep and sincere devotion, the conditioned responses of the human mind are transcended and the mind becomes open to receive the grace that the Dark Mother stands for. Thus, the Mother appears endearing rather than frightening, as is the usual response to the terrifying aspect of the Goddess.

The divine is, in a word, the embodiment of love and we are mere reflections of this unfathomable love. True devotion is the ability to receive and reciprocate divine love. Caitanya was a conduit of this love whom people saw in a physical form. Through his divine play people felt the great passion of his heart firsthand. As a song puts it, He pours love (*Premo kolośe kolośe dhāle*):

He pours love
into pot after pot,
But his love
never gets exhausted.

In the dark jungle of life's miseries, such

a song is a guiding light, telling us that we are never alone, never forsaken. If we forget the indelible love that the Almighty has for us, it is due to our own short-sightedness. God is always loving, and except asking for our love, 'our devotion', He makes no other demand on us. He is the giver and we are the pots. If we keep the pot filled with the matters of the world, try as He does, he cannot find any place in the pot to pour his love into. So our task is to keep the pot empty. Then the love of God will fill it and keep it filled constantly because in the storehouse of God's love, there is no dearth, no scarcity.

But this seems to be an impossibly difficult task to the person who is completely engrossed in the activities of living in this world of illusions. Again, a song laments this and says: 'I find time for all work (*Āmi śokolo kājer pai mā śomoy*). But none to call on you, Mother!'

Awareness of the problem itself is considered the first step towards its solution. After we have indulged in the game of life to our heart's content we may suddenly wake up to lack of devotion or devotional activities in our timetable. This realization itself is the greatest



Rajanikānta Sen, a renowned Bengali poet-saint

blessing of the Divine; through this realization we can direct the mind inward, moving away from all the other tasks which had kept us busy till this point of time.

The world then appears as that place of desires which we desired. But having the desires fulfilled leaves us more dissatisfied. Then there is only one desire left and that is to move to a realm away from these dissatisfying desires. 'The desire to come to the world' (*Āśār āśā bhober āśā*):

The desire to come to the world
has merely remained a desire.

You brought me here
with the promise of play;
But what is this game, Mother,
which does not quench my desire.

Rāmprasād says, enough of the world's play;
Now at dusk take your child back home
on Your lap.

The final abode of all peace is where we are all heading, irrespective of caste, creed, race or religion. All scriptures speak of this eternal and ultimate peace as the goal of life. Why then do human communities have so much strife in the name of religion? Music can be seen here, too, as an end of all unrest. Because, in music there is no religious conflict and to think that all forms of the Divine are one and the same is a resolution of all strife resulting from misdirected religious zeal or spiritual misdirection. As the poignantly and truly secular song suggests:

I have finally understood Mother.

You are an Arch-magician;

Whoever calls You with whatever name,
You are willing to take up that very form.

The song goes on to enumerate the names of Allāh, Śiva, Rādhā, Śakti, Gaṇeśa and many other divine forms in order to show that all forms finally merge in the unity which is the cosmic Consciousness. The mind, unfortunately, is deluded by dualities and needs the right impetus to find this simple yet elusive reality. When this unity becomes a part of our

felt experience, the world is aglow with the flame of love and no being seems separate from our limited selves. What joy to be surrounded by the warmth of God's love and be cocooned together in the ideal of oneness!

Finally, what is needed in inspiring true devotion in the heart is yearning and there can be no better symbol of yearning than the love of Rādhā for Kṛṣṇa. What she felt for her beloved is the agony of her soul yearning for union with him. The very sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute made her mad with the desire to rush to him. The waiting beloved would blow into his flute and Rādhā would rush to his side from wherever she was. No considerations of time, place or conformity to the expectations of socially accepted code of conduct could stop her haste. If she could not answer his musical call she would feel totally lost and dejected. The human soul needs to emulate this emotion of Rādhā in order to experience true devotion and the best way to do this is through a constant exposure to music.

Thus, there is music for every nuance of experience, for every inexpressible emotion, for every deep truth. Through these melodious and memorable songs an entire course in spiritual discipline can be worked out. Music as the medium of understanding and expressing the movements of the spirit is a novel manner of spiritual endeavour. It is a path which beckons us, the delay is only in our embarking on the path. Let us begin this adventurous journey through music to the destination of devotion.

One can end with no better words than the injunction of the Master on the importance of music to devotion. As he rightly said: 'Bhakti is the only essential thing. One obtains love of God by constantly chanting His name and singing His glories' (*Gospel*, p.158). These words are, certainly, the essence of life, and if we can follow them to the letter we shall realize all that the Master exhorted us to do in this precious human birth. □

Adoration in Hindu Devotional Songs

PRAVRAJIKA SHUDDHATMAMATA

Pravrajika Shuddhatmamataji is an American nun, living at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata. The pravrajika is well known as a scholar on mysticism, and many of her articles on Tamil and Marathi saints have been published. In this article, Shuddhatmamataji studies the devotion expressed by saints belonging to different regions through their heart-rending songs.

A pilgrim from south India once came to the north and, in the course of his wanderings, met Lokasāraṅga Mahāmuni. Lokasāraṅga asked him, 'Son, what is the news from your part of the country?' The pilgrim replied: 'Sir, there people are singing and glorifying the *Tiruvaimoli* by Nammālvār.' 'Please recite something from it then, if you can,' said Lokasāraṅga. 'I am sorry, sir,' replied the pilgrim. 'I remember but one phrase—'aravamude' [ie, insatiable ambrosia, or inexhaustible fountain of bliss].'



Nammālvār with Madhurakavi Ālvār at his feet

Lokasāraṅga was startled. 'What!' he exclaimed. 'Do they really have such a sweet name for God there?' He immediately got up and left for the place where this name of the Lord originated.¹

The glories of the Lord are indeed inexhaustible, as He Himself is infinite. Fortunately for lovers of God it is so, for their taste for the Lord's glories is insatiable. They cannot hear enough about them. They cannot speak enough about them. And, for the poet-saints, they cannot sing enough about them. This too is our good fortune. Once, remarking on another verse by Nammālvār (beginning with 'O Lord of celestials, through grace, You have entered my heart'²), Parāśara Bhaṭṭar exclaimed: 'What joy, that there have been saints like Nammālvār born on this earth—saints who

1. Alkondavilli Govindacharya, *Divine Wisdom of the Dravida Saints* (Madras: C.N. Press, 1902), pp. 110-1, edited. The verse the pilgrim was referring to glorifies the form of Viṣṇu at Tirukkudaṇḍai thus: 'Insatiable ambrosia! First Lord! My body melts in love for you. You make me weep and toss like restless water. I see Your resplendent form in Tirukkudaṇḍai, reclining amid fertile waters, fanned by whisks of golden paddy.' —*Tiruvaimoli*, 5.8.1. From *The Sacred Book of Four Thousand*, trans. Srirama Bharati (Chennai: Sri Sadagopan Tirunarayanadaswami Divya Prabandha Pathasala, 2000), p. 520.
2. *Tiruvaimoli*, 5.7.7. From *The Sacred Book of Four Thousand*, p. 518.



Prahlāda's adoration:
Art by Shubhra Nag

have left us such consoling verses as these—verses which melt our stony hearts! One may undergo the severest course of discipline and austerity;

one may have subdued one's senses through self-control—through *yama*, etc—but the heart inside may remain as hard as steel. Only verses such as these succeed in tempering and melting it.³

In the seventh book of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, the great devotee Prahlāda recommends nine ways of adoring God: *śravaṇam*, hearing the names and glories of the Lord; *kīrtanam*, singing His names and glories; *smaraṇam*, thinking of and meditating on Him; *pādasevanam*, serving Him; *arcanam*, worshipping Him; *vandanam*, offering salutations to Him; *dāsyam*, dedicating one's actions to Him; *sakhyam*, cultivating friendship with Him; *ātma-nivēdanam*, offering oneself as well as everything one has to Him. According to Prahlāda, by practising these devotional disciplines, love for the Lord is quickly awakened in a person. Of these nine disciplines, *kīrtanam*, or singing the names and glories of God, is probably the most popular.

Why does one sing the names of God? What is there in a simple name? The saint Nāmdev says:

Can anything at all
equal the name Rāma, brother?
Why then this yoga, sacrifice, commandments,
penance, mortification?

Put them on the scale:
the Vedas and Purāṇas.

Only half of the name Rāma
will equal their weight.

Visit every holy place if you will,
never will you find one as holy as
the name Rāma.

Reflect, *sants*,

on the Inner Witness, the Great Saviour
the Slayer of Mura says Nāmdev.⁴

Similarly, in his drama *Vidagdha-mādhava*,
Rūpa Gosvāmī says:

Dancing on the tip of your tongue,



Prahlāda's realization: Art by Shubhra Nag

3. *Divine Wisdom of the Dravida Saints*, p. 108, edited.

4. *The Hindi Padavali of Namdev*, trans. Winand M. Callewaert and Mukund Lath (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), p. 223.



Śrī Rāmānuja

they make you long for myriads of mouths;
Alighting in the hollow of your ear,
they make you wish for ears in plenitude;
And when they reach the doorway to your heart,
they still the turbulence of all the senses:

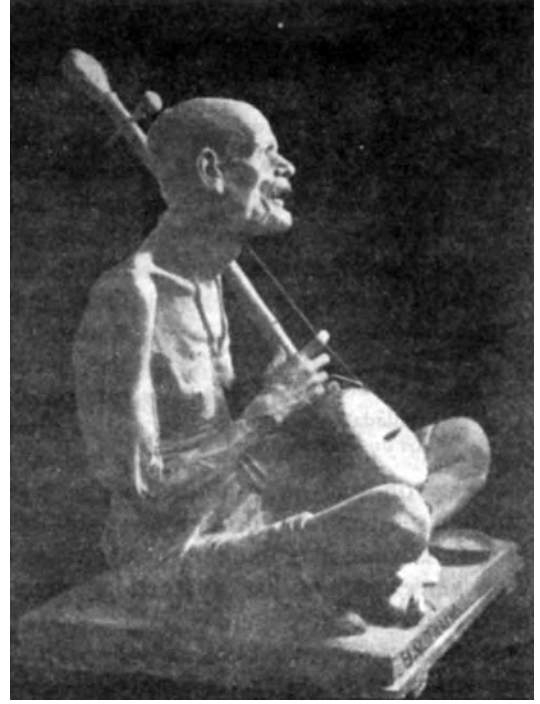
'Kṛṣ-ṇa'—just two syllables—

yet how much nectar do they not contain?⁵

According to Rāmprasad, the name of Kālī is the music that will drive away even death:

Death the thief is close behind thee. Awake, I tell
thee then, my mind, and slumber not. Take thy
sword, the name of Kālī; thy shield is Tārā's

5. *Vidagdhamadhava*, 1.15, trans. Donna Marie Wulff, 'A Sanskrit Portrait: Radha in the Plays of Rupa Goswami' in *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995), p. 30.



Śrī Sūrdās

name. Then, O mind, shall Death be able to force thee to his will? The name of Kālī is sounding out its music. Mind of mind, call upon the name of Durgā, and turn darkness into day. If Kālī does not save me, in this evil age when unnumbered sinners have been saved, is Rāmprasad a thief and worse than they?⁶

More often, however, devotional songs are written to describe either the Lord's physical attributes or His *līlā*—His play. And in describing the Lord's play, the poet-saint perhaps recounts what is given in religious texts; but he might also give a hint of his own experiences during meditation of the Lord's play. In Prahlāda's list of nine ways of adoration, *kīrtanam* (singing the names and glories of the Lord) comes after *śravaṇam* (hearing the names and glories of the Lord) and before *smaraṇam* (thinking of and meditating on the Lord's glories). *Śravaṇam* is more an external

6. *Bengali Religious Lyrics (Sakta)*, trans. Edward J. Thompson and Arthur Marshman Spenser (Calcutta: Association Press, 1923), p. 65.

discipline, though how much one hears depends on one's concentration and devotion. *Smaranam*, on the other hand, is purely one's concentration and devotion. *Smaranam* literally means 'remembering'. According to Rāmānuja, meditation is 'a constant remembrance (*smṛti*), uninterrupted like the flow of oil. ... This remembrance (*smṛti*) takes the form of a vision (*darśana-rūpa*) and it possesses the character of immediate perception (*pratyakṣatā*). Remembrance is a form of direct perception (*sākṣātkāra-rūpa*).'⁷

Thus *kīrtanam* comes between *śravaṇam* and *smaranam* because one sings of what one has heard, and in the process, one begins to internalize all the glories and attributes of the Lord. The purpose of singing, then, is to create a meditative mood. And we can understand this because singing of the Lord is a very joyful experience. At the same time, however, the writers of the songs are often communicating through their poetry what they themselves have seen in meditation. Thus, as D.L. Haberman says, 'Poetry is used both to ex-



'O mother! Look to see if there's earth in my mouth!'



Mīrābāi: Art by Shubhra Nag

press the meditative experience and evoke the meditative experience.'⁸

Sometimes poets simply describe the physical attributes of the Lord, whom they have seen in a vision. And it is their descriptions which give us something to meditate on, as in this poem about Śiva by Akka Mahādevī:

I have seen Him in His divine form,
Him with the matted locks,
Him with the jewelled crown,
Him with the gleaming teeth,
Him with the smiling face,
Him who illumines the fourteen worlds

7. Rāmānuja, *Śrī Bhāṣya*, 1.1. Quoted in David L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 124-25.

8. *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, p. 130.



Lord Viṣṇu with His consorts Śrīdevī and Bhūdevī

with the light of His eyes.

I have seen Him and the thirst of my eyes is quenched.

I have seen the great Lord whom the men among men serve but as wives.

I have seen the supreme Guru Chenna Mallikārjuna sporting with the Primeval Śakti, And saved am I.⁹

Again, the poet, in his meditation, might be a witness to the Lord's play. While sharing with his audience what he has seen, he also invokes a mood within us. This can be illustrated by the following song of Sūrdās about Kṛṣṇa, the butter thief:

Mother mine! I did not eat butter!

It so happened that early morning, behind the singing group

I was sent to Madhuvan.

For twelve hours I roamed in the bamboo laden paths and returned home in the evening.

I am a small boy! How could I reach the pot of butter way above; all these youngsters are after me and have smeared the butter on my face.

You, mother, are very simple-hearted, you have

9. Translated by T.N. Sreekantaiya, 'Akka Mahadevi' in *Women Saints of East and West* (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1979), p. 40.

10. *Sacred Songs of India*, trans. V.K. Subramanian (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1996), p. 235.

11. A.K. Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning* (Penguin Books), p. 154.

fallen for these youngsters' accusations!

If there is even a little suspicion in your heart, I shall go elsewhere.

Take this stick and blanket of yours, you have made a lot of fuss!

Sūrdās sings: Yaśodā then smiled and lifting him up, embraced him.¹⁰

But there are other songs in which the poets are actual participants in the Lord's play. According to A.K. Ramanujan, Nammālvār was probably the first to write in this style: 'In the Aļvār's [ie, Nammālvār's] poems, for the first time in the history of Indian literature, the Kṛṣṇa myth provides a full scenario for present action and poetry, the poet enacts it, relives it in many roles. A myth becomes a correlative for present feeling; a cultural archetype is invoked by and for present experience.' In many of Nammālvār's poems, 'he speaks as an actor in the Kṛṣṇa myth; he is the beloved who pines for the Lord, sends birds as messengers to him, sees all nature pining for him; the poet is also the girlfriend who consoles and counsels, and the mother who restrains her and despairs over her daughter's lovesick fantasies.'¹¹ In the following song, Nammālvār, as a girl in love with the Lord, scolds her bird for not tak-



Saint Sundarar: Art by Shubhra Nag

ing her message to him:

Is that you, little bird?
When I asked you to go
as my messenger to the great Lord
and tell him of my pain,
you dawdled, didn't go.

I've lost my looks,
my dark limbs are pale.
Go look for someone else
to put sweet things
in your beak, go now.¹²

Again, in this poem by Mīrābāi, she has become a *gopi*, grieving over Kṛṣṇa's departure for Mathura:

O my friend, my shyness
became my enemy.

Why did I not go away with my prince Śrī Gopāl?
I stood wringing my hands when cruel Akrūr
took him away in a chariot.

Separated from Shyām,
my body is now consumed by fire.

Mīrā, the slave of Prince Giridhar, wonders,
What is sustaining me?¹³

Sometimes the poet-saints express their relationship to the Lord in very unusual terms. This is one of Tukārām's 'dog songs':

Like a dog lying at Your door
'Hari! Hari!'

I bark Your name; I bark, I get up,
I sit down again.

But never, O Gopāl, would I leave Your feet;

Says Tukā, 'I know My master's weakness:
He just loves to fondle His pet!'¹⁴

To Sundarar, Śiva was his dear friend—a friend he could tease. Here the saint humorously wonders how this strange Lord could have any devotees:

From pits and caves and lonely shrines
He catches snakes and teaches them to dance!
Had we known the strangeness of his ways
Would we have come to serve him?

On his shoulders a tiger skin;
around his waist the skin of a deer;
wrapped all around him an elephant skin!
Had we known of this his strange attire
Would we have come to serve him?¹⁵

Another theme the poet-saints frequently turn to is God's playfulness. Does God take anything seriously? Or is all this creation and destruction just play? Does the Lord care what happens to us? Kālī and Śiva are often portrayed as dancing, while universes are created and destroyed in their dance. But the poet-saints also enjoy themselves as they poke fun at what seems to be God's self-forgetfulness and absorption in His own games. In the following song by Sūrdās, even Viṣṇu's relationship with this world—which he is supposed to protect through His incarnations—is tenuous. As a little baby, absorbed in playing with His foot He has forgotten all about the fact that He is supposed to be maintaining this

12. *Tiruvaimoli* 1.4.8. Quoted in *Hymns for the Drowning*, p. 52.

13. Usha Nilsson, *Mira Bai* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademy, 1997), p. 65. There is a play on words here with 'cruel Akrūr' (ie, Akrūra). *Krūra* means cruel; *akrūra* means not cruel. He is the cruel not-cruel one. In other words, by taking Kṛṣṇa away from Vrindavan, Akrūra is a traitor to his name.

14. *Says Tuka: Selected Poetry of Tukaram*, trans. Dhilp Chitre (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 88.

15. Vidya Deheja, *Slaves of the Lord: The Path of Tamil Saints* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988), p. 12.



A saint in the making in prayer

universe:

Holding his foot in his hand, Gopāl is sucking his toe.

He lies alone in his cradle absorbed in his happy play.

Śiva has started worrying and Brahmā has become thoughtful.

The banyan tree has reached the level of the water of the sea.

Thinking that the clouds of Pralaya are gathering in the sky, the Dikpatis are rounding up their elephants.

Sages are fearful in their hearts, the earth is shaking and the serpent Śeṣa is spreading his hood in anxiety.

The folks of Vraja do not know what is happening.

Sūrdās says that he knows what will happen and so is worried.¹⁶

But with all their glorification of the Lord's qualities, the poet-saints never forgot that God is also formless and beyond anything we can describe or imagine. Nāmdev reminds us here that the whole universe—including all religions—is contained in Him:

Come Keśav, my ecstatic fakir.

Come in the guise of an Abdal, O Father.

The world is your crown
the seven nether-regions your feet.

The earth is your leather apron.

Such is your guise, Gopāl.

The green of the earth

is your mace the whole world your bowl.

And you have fifty-six million sixteen thousand drawstrings in your apparel.

Thy body is the mosque, the heart



Śrī Raṅganātha: Viṣṇu, the Lord of the Ālṅvārs,
lying on Ādiśeṣa

the *maulvi* quietly praying.
Sometimes he has a form,
but sometimes none.

You roamed over cities and jungles.

No one could fathom your secret.

Nāmdev's heart is drawn to him.

Come sit near me, Lord Rāma!¹⁷

Where do we stop? The adorations of these poet-saints seem to be as infinite as the infinite Lord. And how can they stop praising Him? The Lord loves to hear His own praises sung. That is why, to those who have nothing but God, He gives Himself and makes them sing of Him. For the poet-saints never feel that the songs they sing are their own. So Nammāṅvār says:

My Lord

who swept me away forever into joy that day,
made me over into himself and sang in Tamil
his own songs through me:

what shall I say to the first of things,

flame standing there,

what shall I say to stop?¹⁸ □

18. *Tiruvaimoli*, 7.9.1. Quoted in *Hymns for the Drowning*, p. 85.

16. 'The Poems of Surdas for Advanced Students of Hindi,' Poem 22, trans. S.M. Pandey and Norman H. Zide. Quoted in David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995), pp. 18-19.

17. *The Hindi Padavali of Namdev*, pp. 199-200. 'The Abdal were a special group in the hierarchy of saints among the Sufis. They are said to have had special powers: bringing down rain, ensuring victory, etc.'

Interreligious Dialogue and Adoration

FR MAXIMILIAN MIZZI, OFM CONV

The Director General for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue in Assisi, Italy, Fr Maximilian Mizzi, OFM CONV, is a crusader, striving to spread the noble message of interreligious dialogue the world over. He travels worldwide, giving discourses and participating in international-level conferences. Here's a pleasing presentation from Fr Mizzi on interreligious dialogue as adoration. Some photographs for this article were supplied by the author himself.

Towards Interreligious Understanding

Until not many years ago we Christians would never discuss anything pertaining to spirituality with the followers of the other world religions. The reason was very clear. We Christians thought that we had nothing in common with religions that are not Christian. 'How can we talk with non-Christian people about God, about prayer, about spirituality,' we would argue, 'if we have nothing like that in common?'

I remember that many years ago, soon after I arrived in Assisi from my native Malta, I was living in Rivotorto, a small village just outside Assisi. It is a very holy place. St Francis had lived in Rivotorto with his first disciples for three years. That was in the very beginning of the Franciscan Order. One afternoon when I was in the small church I saw a Hindu monk there and I wondered why he was there. As if reading my mind he came towards me and asked me to tell him something about the mysticism of St Francis as compared to the mysticism of Hindu saints. 'Oh!' I said, 'there is nothing to be compared,' and left him like that. That happened 42 years ago. Now after all these years I feel very sad about my behaviour towards that Hindu brother.

By means of interreligious dialogue my approach to the other religions has changed radically. God

gave me the grace of meeting with hundreds of religious spiritual leaders and with thousands of people of other faiths. By meeting these people I have learned many things about their religious beliefs. I have come to respect them, to appreciate them, and to love them as they are for what they are. Above all, I have learned to appreciate their spirituality.

Religion and Spirituality

After the World Day of Prayer for Peace which was held in Assisi by invitation of Pope John Paul II in 1986 a local paper referred to Buddhism as a 'religion without God'. I felt very uneasy about those words. I thought that



The ultimate sacrifice of Christ: Art by Shubhra Nag



St Francis

those words do not do justice to that religion. Since then I have asked myself several times whether it is possible that there can be a religion without God.

Two years ago the Tibetan community in India organized a round table conference on 'Religion and Spirituality' with the participation of

His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I had the joy of being a member of the panel. When I went to the podium to share my reflections my first remark was: 'Is there any religion without spirituality? Spirituality is for religion what the soul is for the body. Take away spirituality from religion and religion will fall into pieces.'

Religious leaders have been coming together to talk about many crucial problems such as world peace, justice, mutual respect, the safeguard of creation and other very important issues. This has proved to be very important indeed. On other occasions religious spiritual leaders met to dialogue about spiritual matters such as meditation. I think that it's time that religious leaders came together to talk more about spiritual and religious matters such as God, adoration, prayer, life after life, etc, which are of great importance and can open new windows into the religious beliefs of the world religions.

The attitude of every religion towards God differs from one religion to another. I can only speak about the attitude and belief of the Christian religion towards God.

God in Christianity

A Christian is a follower of Christ according to his teaching in the gospels. First of all,

Christians believe that God is one, he is eternal, that he has no beginning nor end, that he is the creator of man, that he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, who became man from a virgin mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. They believe that Jesus Christ died for the salvation of humanity but he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Christians believe that God sent the Holy Spirit to give life and sanctity to those who accept God in their life and want to be faithful to God.

Christians believe that God is the creator of man and woman, he is the creator of the animal world and of all that is seen and unseen. They believe that life continues after bodily death. For this reason they believe that those who were faithful to God on earth will continue to live in the fellowship of God in peace and all purity for all eternity.

God is the God of love; he is a loving God and a loving father (and mother). As such he takes care of his children. Because he loves his children he sent Jesus Christ, his Son, to redeem the world and save the world from eternal damnation by offering himself as a living sacrifice for us.

For this reason God deserves our praise, our gratitude, and our thanksgiving. He is the God of justice and will punish the evil-doers. But he is not to be identified with cruelty or punishment because he is the God of compassion, of mercy and of love.

St Francis of Assisi loved God with all his heart and mind and he loved every human being independently of race or creed. In the time when the Crusaders and Saracens were killing each other in fierce battles,



St Mary, Mother of Jesus

Francis called the Muslims 'brothers'. He had a very deep spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ whom he adored as the Son of God, the redeemer. He prayed and meditated day and night; he fasted for long periods of time and did penance. For the love of God, in the imitation of Jesus Christ, Francis gave up a very rich life and lived in absolute poverty. He humbled himself and called himself the vilest of all human beings who deserves no respect. For the love of God he took care of the sick and the lepers.

Relationship With God

God, being the God of love, is to be more loved than feared. Christians believe that God, besides being their creator, is also their father (and mother) who cares for them, who protects them and who loves them. Because Jesus Christ taught them to call God their father they have a very close relationship with God. They pray to God in their needs, they praise him in their joy. Adoration of God is an essential part of their religious practices. Adoration is reserved to God alone. This is the supreme honour they give only to God. Because Christians believe in only one God they can never worship (adore) another deity. During the first centuries of the Christian era many Christians suffered cruel death and persecution rather than worship the emperor as God or his deities.

Prayer is a means to keep in contact with God. There are many ways to pray. Christians pray with their lips, but also with their heart. When they do some good deed, they

do it for the love of God, like, for example, when they help someone in need that becomes an act of prayer. When they are in need of help Christians resort to prayer. They believe that God is Almighty, that he can help them in their spiritual needs as well as in their physical and material needs. Prayer is a help in need, it brings joy in sorrow, trust in despair, light in darkness, comfort in tribulation.

Praise and thanksgiving are considered to be another aspect of prayer. Francis of Assisi used to call himself 'God's troubadour'. He gave thanks and praise to God all the time of his life. Two years before he died, when he was gravely ill and blind, he composed the famous 'Canticle of Brother Sun'. It's a song of praise to God for the sun, the moon and the stars, for the wind, the fire and the water and, indeed, for all the creatures. In this song of joy and praise he calls all the creatures 'brothers' and 'sisters'. The earth he calls 'Sister and Mother Earth'.

Some Christian mystics like St John of the Cross, St Theresa of Avila, St Francis of Assisi prayed all the time. They lived in the world but they were not of the world. These mystics have come into a very deep relationship with God through prayer, meditation and ascetic practices such as fasting, self-mortification and penance.

Common Roots

Of course, not Christians alone pray. I have always been very impressed when, on many occasions, I saw Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Sufis, and others deeply wrapped in prayer and



St Francis preaching to the birds

meditation in private and in public. The same can be said of ascetics. Poverty and fasting are common to all the world religions. Interreligious dialogue can be of great help by bringing into the open these great spiritual treasures common to all the world religions.

The world religions have originated from the same source, God. They have their roots in the same, one God. Only God, through the Holy Spirit, can inspire the wise and holy teachings and practices, which are found in all the religions. All that is good and holy comes from God. From time to time, God in his infinite mercy, sends prophets to instruct the people in the way of justice and holiness. Christians believe that Jesus Christ was not simply a prophet but the Son of God and himself God.

The Catholic Church teaches that the seeds of the words of Jesus Christ, the rays of that truth which enlighten all people, are found in the religious traditions of humankind. In his Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* ('The Mission of the Redeemer'), John Paul II says (26): 'Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the "seeds of the Word", a "ray of that truth which enlightens all men"; these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind.'



The cross which spoke to St Francis to reform the Church

In the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council, we read: 'From ancient times down to the pres-

ent, there has existed among diverse peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things, the events of human life; at times, indeed, recognition can be found of a supreme Divinity and of a supreme Father, too' (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 2).

No Lack of Respect for Other Faiths

Jesus once said: 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (*St John*, 14.6). The Christian belief that Jesus is the only way to God has hurt, and still hurts, the followers of other religions. The recent Vatican declaration *Dominus Iesus* ('Jesus the Lord') caused a great turmoil and dissatisfaction among the followers of the world religions in many parts of the world. It caused suffering and division. That was very sad indeed. Certainly this statement was not meant to hurt anyone, much less to discredit the other religions. It was not meant either to minimize the holiness of any of these religions. That is to be taken for granted.

First of all, this declaration that Jesus is the Lord reflects the Christian belief. Some time after the issue of the declaration, Pope John Paul II explained that its purpose was 'to invite all Christians to renew their fidelity to him (Christ) in the joy of faith and to bear unanimous witness that the Son, both today and tomorrow, is 'the way, and the truth, and the life' (*St John*, 14.6; Pope John Paul II, Angelus Message, 1 October 2001).

Every religion has its own belief, which does not always reflect the belief of another religion. Sometimes that belief contradicts some of the beliefs of another religion. Christians believe that God is one in three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is what we call the Holy Trinity, which is not accepted by some of the other religions.

One day Jesus was asked by his disciples to teach them how to pray. Jesus taught them to pray in these words: 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but de-

liver us from evil' (*St Matthew*, 6.9-13). Here Jesus Christ taught the Christians to pray to God as their father. According to some religions it is offensive to God that people can address him as 'father'.

One day I was talking with a very holy spiritual leader, a follower of another religion. Among other things I said to him that God loves us in a special way. He created us in his image: 'God created man in the image of himself' (*Genesis*, 1:27). He loves as a mother does her children, because we are his children. The spiritual leader immediately answered: 'How can a human person be God's child if God has no wife, if he is not married?' I tried to explain to him that Christians believe that through Jesus Christ they become God's children. That gave rise to a wonderful conversation. I am not sure whether he understood all that I said, nor that I understood all that he said to me. But it was dialogue. It was not a conflict. We didn't argue. It was a dialogue, which we carried on in all respect, understanding and love.

The Role of Interreligious Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue has a very important role to play with regard to religious matters and matters of faith. There is still a great deal of misunderstanding concerning the religious beliefs and practices that pertain to the different religions. There are still too many prejudices and ignorance concerning the world religions. For these reasons there is much need for the representatives of religions to meet, to explore the spiritual heritage which they have in common and to dialogue about those beliefs on which there is no common consensus.

Interreligious dialogue is needed in the first place to avoid conflicts, secondly to dissipate misunderstanding and prejudice, and thirdly to have a better knowledge of each other's religion.

If you talk to the man in the street about a religion which is not his own, you will notice that he knows very little about it. What is even worse, he may tell you strange things about that religion. He might describe Buddhism,

for example, as a God-less religion, Islam as aggressive, Hinduism he might call pantheistic, Christianity disdainful of the other religions.

Many people think that the world religions have nothing to share with each other and that they differ so much from one another that they

have absolutely nothing in common. It will be through interreligious dialogue that people will have a better understanding of each other's beliefs and practices. It is through interreligious dialogue that they will discover the spiritual heritage of every religion.

Being aware of the importance of interreligious dialogue the Catholic Church tells Christians not to be afraid to engage in dialogue with people of other faiths. At the same time, the Church insists that people who engage in such a dialogue should do so with a great sense of responsibility, that they have a clear idea of what they do and say, that they be honest and sincere about their own faith and that they treat the other religions with respect. In order to avoid confusion all forms of syncretism, which leads to nothing, must be avoided. In this way interreligious dialogue will give people a clearer idea about the spirituality and religiosity of the other religions. It will also help them discover those other beliefs and practices which they have as a common heritage. □



Jesus Christ

Medicine as Adoration

DR SAIBAL GUPTA

Here's a remarkable article on the philosophy of medicine from a renowned doctor. A cardio-thoracic surgeon of international repute writes about the way medical practice could be transformed into an adoration, lauding the ancient Indian system. Dr Saibal Gupta, from Kolkata, has been working tirelessly for the betterment of the field of medicine. A noted writer on many topics, Dr Gupta is the author of the popular Bengali book, Āmār Śomoy.

Dedicate yourself entirely to helping the sick, even though this be at the cost of your own life. Never harm the sick, not even in thought. Endeavour always to perfect your knowledge. Treat no women except in the presence of their husbands. The physician should observe all the rules of good dress and good conduct. As soon as he is with a patient, he should concern himself in word and thought with nothing but the sufferer's case. He must not speak outside the house of anything that takes place in the patient's house. He must not speak to a patient of his possible death if by so doing he hurts the patient or anyone else. In the sight of the gods you are to pledge yourself to this. May the gods help you if you follow this rule. Otherwise, may the gods be against you.

This is the final exhortation of Suśruta to his students entering the practice of medicine and surgery. It predates the Hippocratic oath by at least one hundred years, or maybe more. By conservative estimates Suśruta was a contemporary of the Buddha. But a single man could not have done such huge research, from cosmogony through embryology, anatomy and physiology to medicine and surgery in one lifetime. The compilation at the time of the Buddha was, therefore, the result of several preceding centuries of work. The *R̥g Veda* contains a description of amputation followed by replacement by an

iron leg. Āyurveda itself originated around 1000 BC. There are vague evidences of the existence of a *Vṛddha Suśruta* that predates the present *Suśruta Samhitā*, but nothing of that text has survived. Precepts of Āyurveda and Suśruta spread to the entire known civilized world like Greece, Mesopotamia, Egypt and China. In any case, during the Achaemenid Empire in Persia in the 6th century BC there was a regular exchange of knowledge among the learned men from different parts of the world. As late as the 11th century AD *Suśruta Samhitā* was translated into Persian and Arabic. The Hippocratic oath, in addition to the principles of Suśruta, mentions the ethics with regard to remuneration of a doctor. Obviously, remuneration was not a problem with



**'O Lord! Please make me all right
so that I may serve you and your creation'**

Suśruta. Knowledge was not an individual's property in ancient India and service was paramount, not its price. This is derived directly from the philosophy of Āyurveda and Suśruta's cosmogony with which his book starts. It is well known that Indian religions, as opposed to the Semitic religions, are based on a rational worldview and identification of man's position in the universe.

According to these philosophical concepts, all bodies—material, living, conscious or unconscious—are evolved out of *prakṛti* by the subtle influence of *puruṣa*, the Absolute, or the primal Self-conscious Principle. The living human body is but a manifestation of these factors, and every component of the human organism, including his mind and sense faculties, is created out of the *tattvas* as evolved out of *prakṛti*. Divinity attains its highest manifestation in the human being. That divinity is therefore intrinsic to everything and every human being. This concept is behind the exhortation of Suśruta, that service to man is service to God. 'Above all, the aim of Āyurveda is the attainment of the ultimate Truth or salvation by which the human mind realizes the identity of the individual soul with the universal Soul and can thus rise above unhappiness, pain and mortal destruction.' The basic concepts of this philosophy are being corroborated by modern science in many areas. But it is necessary to examine what such a life philosophy achieved, and, fortunately, records exist in medical science of its achievements. The achievements in many other areas, such as mathematics, science, technology, metallurgy, etc are either incomplete or absent because of our reticence to record achievements as expressions of pride. It is enough to consider only the *Suśruta Samhitā*. The work consists of 120 chapters, compiled in five volumes, followed by a sixth volume, known as *Uttaratantra*, compiled by Nāgārjuna in the 3rd or 4th century BC. Subsequent additions have been made up to the 11th century AD by various scholars like Jejjāda Ācārya, Gayādāsa, Bhāskara, Mādhava, Brahmadeva,

Dallaṇa and Cakrapāṇi Dutta. There are descriptions of 700 medicines, 3,000 surgical instruments and thousands of disease-processes with their symptomatology and treatment—both medical and surgical. Suśruta has said: 'Only the union of medicine and surgery constitutes a complete doctor. The doctor who lacks knowledge of one of those branches is like a bird with only one wing.'

The entire process of a surgical operation has been divided into three phases—*pūrva-karma*, *pradhāna-karma* and *pāścāt-karma*, which corresponds to preoperative, operative and postoperative care of our times. In *pūrva-karma*, apart from preparation of the patient, the preparation of the operation theatre is described. It describes how the room has to be cleaned, and with what materials. It then has to be fumigated with the smoke from certain medicinal herbs. The particular area of the patient's body has to be cleaned with certain antiseptic lotions. The patient has to be given a small amount of food before certain operations such as those on the head, neck and limbs, but kept fasting for operations on the abdomen and intestines. The surgeon should again examine the patient and his records immediately before operation and then clean himself and his hands and prepare himself mentally. With this sort of discipline and application miraculous advancements were achieved.

Suśruta has given detailed curricula for the training of a surgeon, some of which are relevant even today. There are descriptions of almost every type of operation on the body except on the chest. Plastic surgery was born for reconstruction of the nose and ear. Such meticulous operations could not have been done without some form of general anaesthesia. The book *Bhoja Prabandha* by Paṇḍita Ballāla describes an operation on the King of Bhoja, where a tumour of the brain was removed by trephining a hole in the skull. In the description of the operation, a drug known as *saṁmohini* was used to make him insensible and, after the operation, another drug *sañjivini*

was used to bring back his consciousness. The knowledge of such drugs has been lost in antiquity. The meticulous aseptic and antiseptic principles of surgery, described by Suśruta, were discovered in Europe only in late 19th century by Lord Lister and the same principles of fumigation were applied. This is considered a milestone in western surgery. Even the wearing of clean clothes by the surgeon was accepted in Europe only in the 19th century. Before that the surgeons used to wear the same dirty gown throughout their lives as a mark of their seniority and experience. No doubt that the mortality after even the simplest operation was high.

As a matter of fact, there was nothing much to choose between Indian and European surgery till the 19th century. But whereas they were progressing, we were static from the 11th century. The idea of serving God through the service of man achieved spectacular results over two millennia. Emperor Aśoka in his Girnar edict stated that he created hospitals for both men and animals. A century later, King Dutta Gāmani is said to have listed among his good deeds the founding of 18 hospitals for the poor. There was no casteism as far as the practice of medicine was concerned. A person from any caste could be a student once he convinced the teacher of his moral standing and basic learning.

In a commentary on *Suśruta Samhitā* in a recent book, it has been said: 'It is noteworthy that Indian religion and mysticism would permit a system of secular medicine which engaged in sound, rational practice even though not completely free of magical and religious association.' It is tragic that the West has always termed our religion and philosophy as mystical, not understanding their basic rationality. The whole underlying philosophy of medicine is neither mystical nor impractical. All activities for the betterment of mankind are adoration of God and medicine is specially so since it brings direct benefit both to the healer and the healed, if done as service. This is fundamental to all religions and its realiza-

tion not only in principle but deep down in one's consciousness and psyche is known as the realization of God. Ancient Indian knowledge developed under this philosophy. It is surprising how easily man forgets that and ascribes it to mysticism and forgets that their greatest discoveries have been made in the service of humanity. Is the ideal of serving God through service to humankind, and thereby realizing God, only a mystical Indian theology, or is it a practical step for the development of the entire humanity and really the mother of all religions? Let us examine it from the history of development of western medicine.

Development of medicine in Europe stagnated after Galen in the second century AD. With all his erudition, Galen brought mysticism into medicine that won the support of the Christian Church. The Middle Ages and the Dark Ages of Europe continued after that when all quest for knowledge was snuffed out. The Renaissance in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries brought changes in medicine as it did in other branches of science. What were the influences that brought in the Renaissance in Europe has been the subject of much discussion. But undoubtedly the humanistic rationalism of Greece and the Neoplatonic ideals in Greece, the Middle East and Alexandria were the major influences. It's to be noted here that Neoplatonic ideas are mostly Vedantic. There are stark resemblances between Neoplatonism and Vedanta.

Along with Galileo and Giordano Bruno there was also Andreas Vesalius in medicine. The King of Spain saved him from the Inquisition. His conviction was for saying that men had exactly the same number of ribs as women and not one less as claimed by the *Book of Genesis*. Even now the Pope wants physicists like Stephen Hawking to endorse the presence of God, and labels other religions as inadequate. The progress after the 16th century continued slowly at first as the humanistic ideals took hold, culminating in fundamental progress in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In the pro-



The doctor's sacrifice: Edward Jenner inoculating his own son

cess, many people have made great sacrifices, and endangered their lives to make new discoveries, sometimes ignoring the mockery and cruelty of society. Their only motive was benefit to humankind and a quest for knowledge. There are many names, like Ambrose Pare, William Harvey, Edward Jenner, Ignaz Semmelweiss, Louis Pasteur, Rudolph Virchow, to name but a few. We are still continuing in its momentum. We in India have also come out of our dark ages in the current of this advancement with the rejuvenation of our ancient ideals. But it is time now to ponder, and men are thinking all over the world.

Are we still progressing on the humanistic urges of the 19th century or has a large portion of the impetus been taken over by greed?

That is why drug companies today invest huge amounts in research not just for the benefit of humanity but also to stay ahead in the corporate race. They can easily keep producing slightly older drugs and distribute them at negligible price for the poor of the world, but will they ever do it? That is why drugs that enslave man are produced and distributed in such large amounts.

That is why the richest nations consume the highest amounts of narcotics. Alfred Nobel donated his wealth for scientific work beneficial to humankind because he felt guilty of inventing something that could destroy the world. Today there is no such repentance. Research on weapons of mass destruction goes on without compunction in every country while people starve. Research in medicine brings in newer drugs and newer methods that a majority of people cannot avail of. The world is only progressing towards higher discontent. Where is the end? Science

fiction is already propagating the idea of a chosen few of the humanity in space leaving the squalor behind on earth. How can we establish our divinity? Einstein had once written: 'The cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research.' Experience through the ages has shown that this is the only practical principle for development of research and practice in medicine—an adoration of God through service to humanity.

Medicine encompasses many things: philosophy, history of civilization, science, service, profession, business and politics. Without a philosophy it can never deliver the healing touch that it is meant to give. □

Management as Adoration

PRAKASH LOHIA

An expert in the field of management, who is also an earnest devotee seeking higher values, shares his brilliant ideas on adoration with us. Prakash Lohia graduated in engineering from IIT, New Delhi, and did management from IIM, Ahmedabad. He runs a huge high-pressure decorative lamination firm. Lohia is endeavouring to transform work into worship, considering his work as a God-given opportunity to serve Him. Here are Sri Lohia's views about management as adoration.

Management and Adoration

We are familiar with the famous exhortation 'work is worship'. Management is indeed an important type of work, and adoration is very akin to worship, perhaps with some nuances of love and passion. How these two could be combined to bring about a transformation in the practitioner's life is our subject.

The origin of the art and science of management as well as human civilization can be traced to the same roots, namely, utilizing the surplus to satisfy our needs beyond mere subsistence. The increasing complexity of civilization has contributed to the ever-growing complexity of management functions. So 'management' is a word which covers a very wide range of human activities. We can further add that management involves apt handling of *men, material and environment*. But let us confine ourselves here to the meaning associated with executive, administrative and supervisory direction of business/economic activity, that too in the context of running an enterprise.

The aims of an enterprise are to satisfy the needs and desires of the stakeholder. The stakeholders include the shareholders, the human resources engaged in the functioning of the enterprise, the customers, and the society at large. This expectation of striving for the benefit of all makes the function extremely difficult, complex and challenging. But there are valuable suggestions in Indian scriptures to attain success in this field, and the third chap-

ter of *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, which deals with karma yoga for the attainment of spiritual ends, is strewn with principles to achieve this objective on the material plain as well.

The *Puruṣārtha*-ideal

The classical Indian principle of *puruṣārtha* is a very effective conceptual framework to deal with the complexities mentioned above. The four ideals, which serve as the ends of human pursuit or *puruṣārthas* are known as *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*. Let us try to understand the individual terms. *Kāma* or desire means that it is accepted that human beings, singly or collectively, have materialistic desires, gross or refined, to fulfill. *Artha* or resources are required to fulfill the desires, and these need to be raised, acquired or generated. *Dharma* or system is defined as that which protects: '*dhāraṇāt dharma iti āhuḥ*, system is that which sustains.' *Kāma* and the mode of raising *artha* need to be governed by the tenets of *dharma*. The framework provided by *dharma* or system sustains and encourages collective well-being, and protects the creation. This concept of *puruṣārtha* is derived from Vedānta.

Up till this stage there is not much difference between the materialistic schools founded by and large on the principles of utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is the doctrine that the useful is good and that the determining consideration of right conduct should be the usefulness of its consequences. It is a theory which says that right action should be the larg-

est possible balance of pleasure over pain; or that an action is right if it brings the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Failure of the Materialistic Approach

The materialistic intellect perceives the human being more as an evolved animal as explained by Darwin. Hence experiments on rats and monkeys, and observation of their behaviour under different conditions, form the core of understanding of the human mind. To the materialists, consciousness which primarily differentiates human beings from other animals is derivative of matter.

This partial understanding of human nature evolved mechanisms of rewards/encouragement and punishments/discouragement on physical, emotional and intellectual planes at the individual level; checks and balances between different institutions like the judiciary, political system, administrative machinery, etc at social and national levels; and different political philosophies at the global level to promote the overall progress and prosperity of the human society. In spite of sincere efforts, this partial understanding has left lacunas in the schemes thus developed, which hinder the achievement of the intended goals.

History offers numerous instances from time immemorial of the efforts of great intellects and thinkers who have offered different models to manage human affairs to the best of their understanding, but have fallen short of fulfilling the expectations. Plato's *Republic*, Karl Marx's *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, etc are some of the examples to cite. Utilitarianism remains the *raison d'être* of these models.

Utilitarianism suffers from some fundamental limitations. It encourages the principle of 'ends justifying the means', and its basic premises of doing good to others are not strong enough. We will come to this later. It is not very difficult for a sensitive mind to perceive that the conscious or unconscious basis of all human efforts towards 'the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers' is only philanthropic in nature. It comes from a sense of

unity with all. It is in India that the human intellect, having realized the limitations of materialistic explanations in the external world, dived deep into the inner Self, realized the Truth, and declared boldly to the world: '*Śṛṇvantu viśve amṛtasya putrāḥ*, May the children of Immortal Bliss hear!'¹ That immortal Truth was neither let alone at the stage of intuitive mysticism, nor was it allowed to become just an intellectual pursuit based on speculative arguments. It was developed into a complete science and this light has been continuously kept burning in tune with the *zeitgeist* (the general intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of an era) by an unbroken chain of masters.

The Indian Ideal

This realization became India's own distinctive life-force, which is spirituality, otherwise called religion. Swami Nitya-swarupananda says in *India's Message to Herself and to the World*:

Religion is, in the true sense, the science of the knowledge of man's real nature. It is the perception, the realization, and the manifestation of man's real nature. Man's real nature is pure consciousness, pure existence, and pure bliss. It is divinity itself. It is *Universal*. The soul of every being is thus the same universal spirit, self-ef-fulgent, a sun covered over with clouds of ignorance. The difference between one and another is due to the difference in density of these layers of clouds; the difference is in the stages of growth and manifestation, in degree and not in kind. This eternal truth is the conscious or unconscious basis of all religions, and is the explanation of the whole history of human progress, either on the material, or on the intellectual, or on the spiritual plane—the same universal spirit is manifesting itself through different planes. Religion is thus the consciousness of the eternal truth of the spiritual unity and solidarity of humankind and of civilization.

Coming back to the *puruṣārthas*, *mokṣa*, the fourth ideal, springs from this spiritual in-

1. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 2.5.

sight. *Mokṣa* or liberation is the removal of the clouds of ignorance so that the spirit, like the self-effulgent sun, shines forth in its eternal glory, totally identified with the universe. *Mokṣa* is the *raison d'être* of the *puruṣārtha* model. *Dharma* or System has to be *mokṣa*-oriented. This model boldly admits that if the existence of the world is accepted, denial of *kāma* per se is impractical; rather unnatural. Only the quality of *kāma*, and the acquisition of *artha* to satisfy *kāma*, should be governed by the tenets of *dharma*, so that we do not drift away from our ultimate goal of *mokṣa*.

What happens if we restrict ourselves to the first three ideals—namely, *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*, which we have equated with utilitarianism? In his preface to his English translation of Śaṅkara's *Ātmabodha*, Swami Nikhilananda writes:

The unity of existence is the foundation of all ethical codes. ... We learn from Non-dualistic Vedānta that the true Self of man is the Self of all beings. Therefore, self-love finds its expression and fulfilment in love for all. Without consciousness of the unity of existence, ethics becomes a mere device for makeshift adjustments among conflicting interests; and when these interests are at any time seriously threatened, the ethical codes break down. Without a spiritual sanction, justice is in the interest of the strong.²

In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by Western technology. We frequently use the phrase global village. This reflects a growing awareness of the interrelatedness, interdependence, and interaction of nations, races, regions and civilizations.

The Transforming Power of the Indian Ideal

The management science in the Western world has reached a stage of consciousness where it is admitted that its principal objective should be '*bahujana hitāya bahujana sukhāya*, for

the well-being of all, for the happiness of all.' The voluntary acceptance of stiff environmental and other safety norms, bringing in the self-imposed discipline of transparency in the annual reports, etc are some of the indicators of this growing consciousness. But at the same time we find that utilitarianism on which this predominantly materialistic civilization leans to pursue such a lofty ideal is not scientific enough or rationally strong enough to prevent exploitation of the weak by the strong. The urge for unity, unconscious of its real rationale, tried to find expression through grossly materialistic philosophies like communism, but this crumbled down like a structure bereft of foundation. What could be a real philosophy that would work to bring about a dream change in the management situation? Which idea would really be useful in making management a true progressive system, aimed at everyone's well-being?

Destiny reposed on India the task of solving the riddle. And solve she did long ago, in the days of yore, boldly proclaiming that, if the ideal of *bahujana hitāya*, *bahujana sukhāya* is to be truly pursued, it has to be turned into '*ātmano mokṣārtham jagadditāya ca*, for one's own liberation and for the good of the world.' Matters did not end at just declaring the goal. She also developed a total system, founded on the concepts of *caturāśrama* (*brahmacarya*, *gārhasthya*, *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa*), of *puruṣārtha*, etc. Society consists of different types of people with minds at different stages of development, and with different temperaments. The Indian system offered equal opportunity to each type to follow the path that is most conducive to its own nature to reach the same goal, and that too without any conflict of interest between an individual, a set of people (an enterprise) or society at large. Since the system has evolved out of spiritual insight, material prosperity is a natural accomplishment. Vivekananda has declared: 'This infinite power of the spirit, brought to bear upon matter evolves material development, made to act upon thought evolves intellectuality,

2. Śaṅkara, *Ātmabodha*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1967), p. xix.

and made to act upon itself makes of man a God. First, let us be Gods, and then help others to be Gods. "Be and make." Let this be our motto.³ Readers can also refer to Swamiji's observations on Indian history. On the other hand, we are warned of the corrosive and degenerative effect of a materialistic philosophy, if it is allowed to become the goal instead of remaining the means.

Swami Nitya-swarup-ananda says:

... it is not the modes of religion alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths to human fulfilment. There can be no division between 'sacred' and 'secular', nor any difference between service to man and worship of God. 'To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid. Life is itself religion' (Sister Nivedita). The workshop, the study, the studio, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. Art, science, and religion are but different forms, modes, and media of expressing a single truth.

The concepts secular or sacred merge

3. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 4, p. 351.

into one. The consummation of adoration is in the union with the adored one; hence every path that leads to the Lord is a path of adoration. In other words all the yogas are eventually different paths of adoration. The Lord in the *Gītā* declares:

*Ye yathā māñ prapadyante
tāñs-tathaiva bhajāmy-aham;
Mama vartma-anuvartante
manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ.*

According to the manner in which they approach Me, I favour the devotees in that very manner. O son of Pṛthā (Arjuna), human beings follow My path in every way.

Having accepted that 'the workshop, the study, the studio, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple,' we may draw the inspiration from the assuring words of the Lord from the verse quoted above and dare conclude that management of an enterprise performed with the ideal and spirit of *puruṣārtha* is as effective a means to adore Him as fighting a righteous war. □

4. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 4.11.

Thoughts from Maimonides

God is one: He is not two or more than two, but One. He is not one as a species, since this includes numerous individuals, nor one as a body, since this is divisible into parts and sections; but a Unity which is unique in the world. When you are alone by yourself, when you are awake on your couch, be careful to meditate in such precious moments on nothing but the intellectual worship of God, viz, to approach Him and to minister before Him in the true manner—not in hollow emotions. He who serves God from love occupies himself with the Torah and the commandments and walks in the paths of wisdom, not for the sake of any worldly advantage, nor from fear of calamity, nor for the purpose of acquiring good fortune; but he practises truth because it is truth, and the good which is its consequence follows in due course. This standard is exceedingly lofty and not every wise man can attain it. For when a man loves the Lord with that love which is due to Him, he will as a matter of course fulfil all the commandments from love.

—Compiled by Rabbi Beryl D. Cohon. From *Message of the East* (July 1935)

Adoration of Life in the Twilight Years

DR INDRANI CHAKRAVARTY

Dr Indrani Chakravarty is the founder-president of Calcutta Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology (CMIG), Kolkata. This organization aims at serving the helpless senior citizens who have been ignored by their families, a testimonial to the parental generation. How serving senior citizens could be an adoration is Dr Chakravarty's theme.

Beautiful are the moments when the sun starts its journey at dawn, with the sky shedding a crimson glow. However, as the sun sets, the earth beholds glorious twilight moments with sadness. A child is born, and life begins; this nascent state is cared for universally. The child grows, becomes old, and there it ends. Life on earth is tiring and unbearable. Human life in its last phase reaches a respectable height, with the acquisition of wisdom, experience and tolerance. Old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine—as Oliver Goldsmith once listed them—deserve our love more than the new, for their learning and wisdom. Browning's 'Rabbi ben Ezra' proclaims:

Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life for which the first was made,

... Be the fire ashes,

What survives is gold.

The holy scriptures of different religions exhibit a marked ambivalence towards old age. In the Hebrew scriptures, sacred to Christianity and Islam as well as to Judaism, grey hair is described as 'the beauty of the old', a 'crown of glory.' There are explicit injunctions to stand in respect before the grey head, and to honour the face of the old.

The Vedas maintain a somewhat simplistic, naive but fond attitude towards life. The elders are gods, they declare. They wish that a

desire to live a long, healthy life into ripe old age—*jivema śaradaḥ*

śatam—is good. Growing old is a part of the human condition, not a problem to be solved once for all. The Buddhist texts provide an important critique of this lust for life, arguing that ageing is evil and a source of suffering. The Hindu texts provide a balanced and accommodating account of the ageing process. The Hindu thinkers struggle to state what a genuinely positive meaning ageing ought to have. In our classical society, a



Old age means experience: an aged teacher teaches his students.

Art by Shubhra Nag



Shravana Kumara, the ideal son. He served his aged and blind parents with supreme devotion:

Art by Shubhra Nag

father is considered higher than the sky and a mother greater than the earth.

In the traditional societies of the Orient—India, China, Japan—grandparents were not unwanted. The obligation in the Indian family system to look after the elderly, to honour and respect them continues to be discharged even today. Here advancing age had until recently been accompanied by increasing prestige. Young people would often gather around wise old men for guidance and advice. Even those among the aged who were not so much sought after could, almost certainly, have their needs met within the network of the extended family and maintain their role and status as the heads of the family. The spiritual commitment of the young made it obligatory for them not only to look after their parents but also to serve them as God.

Recently, however, the picture has started changing. Development of newer technologies no longer demand that the skills of the artisans should be transmitted down from

one generation to the next. With industrialization and the consequent disruption of large undivided families, growth of vast metropolitan areas, changed building styles, the position of the aged is no longer the same. Ageing is a subject of global concern now. Longevity has been a spectacular 20th-century achievement. It is difficult to believe but true that the average lifespan of an Indian was 33 years at the time of our independence, and has now gone up to 62.5 years; and there are today 70 million people over the age of 60 years, who constitute 7% of the total population.

With the extended lifespan, years have been added to life; but how can life be added to the years? Eastern thinkers of the past give us some clues to meet the very important problem of the present. And that's where serving the aged comes.

Everyone is destined sooner or later to get old. Although old age can be a time of fulfilment, of perspective and of wisdom, it has been termed as a period of losses. The losses are chiefly psychological, social and economic in nature. Poor health, economic dependence, and non-working status tend to create amongst the aged a feeling of meaninglessness and powerlessness. Therefore the elderly need help. We must serve them in areas like income, housing, health, security, and post-retirement adjustment.

Article 41 of the Indian Constitution recognizes the needs of the elderly and enjoins upon the state the responsibility of making an effective provision for public assistance in case of unemployment, old age, sickness and disability, and in other cases of undeserved want. But in a vast and populous country like India, the government alone cannot have the desired penetration in social welfare. A network of NGOs, religious and cultural bodies, educational institutions, etc are the need of the hour to meet the challenges of the greying in our part of the globe. The fulfilment of life depends on the allowing of the old to have both productive and creative leisure. The concluding phase of life may be made meaningful and

graceful if health is preserved at least to a bare minimum workable condition. But physical health is not everything. The mind needs care too. People live in their physical worlds, and so cannot realize anything except the force of a physical symbol; and they cannot feel that they are living except for the force of physical actions. All yoga is a turning of the human mind and the human soul from the gross physical towards the inside, to venture in-

wards. It may not yet be divine realization, but there's a feeling of the divine impulse and higher attraction

through it. Emotionally, the first stage from which this turning takes place must be that of simple adoration of God. In religion this adoration wears the form of worship. The same worship could be transformed into the service of the living gods, as Swami

Vivekananda

stressed repeatedly. And of all the living gods, senior citizens are the most helpless section of any society, needing care and love.

So our worship of the parental population started in 1988 when our institution for the aged was founded. With the primary aim of providing a cushion to the old from the roughness of ageing, Calcutta Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology has been purposively

engaged in action-oriented gerontology research for improving the quality of life of our senior citizens. Its mouthpiece, *Ageing and Society*, acts as a platform for scholars and professionals all over the country to place their views.

At the day-care centre of our institution, able-bodied but aged poor receive vocational training like silk-screen printing, bookbinding, envelope and file making, and tailoring for women. The aged but educated can obtain free computer training courses and thereby find part-time re-employment opportunities. Some of them even help with the institution's work.

We provide healthcare both to those who are with us as well as to those around, by arranging camps in slum areas of the Kolkata metropolis.

Serving the aged is beneficial in several

ways. We can also learn from the old themselves what is to be done with age. For the old, an open horizon continues to beckon, in the imagery of the last line of Alfred Tennyson's 'Ulysses':

Old age hath yet his honour and his toil.
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done. □



Life cycle: Art by Shubhra Nag

Working in a Bank

GOUTAM BANERJI

Sri Goutam Banerji is a bank official from Kolkata, who is striving for perfection. His experiences as a seeker serving in a place of intense activity are published here.

Let's imagine the picture inside any of the branches of nationalized banks of India any day at around 10:15 am or, better, during the first seven working days of any month. What do we see? Long queues before each of the payment- and receipt-counters since 9:45 am. Everyone in the line wears a disenchanted look. Quite a few among them are senior citizens, wanting to withdraw money from their pension accounts. Many have other places to go and other duties to perform soon after their bank business is over. Some are students who have come to purchase bank drafts to be sent to educational institutions as fees. Everyone is disturbed because the bank hasn't started functioning yet. Banks generally open at 10:30 am. Each ticking of the clock agitates the minds of the customers more and more. Some begin to criticize bank employees, some even rush to the manager's office and discuss the situation with him.

What's going on at the other side of the counters? Most of the seats are vacant. The computer terminals on the tables are lying idle. Of the, say, 25 people who work in a bank branch, only three or four have reported to duty as yet. Even they are not in their seats. They are gossiping, and are paying the least attention to the waiting people.

All of us who visit banks (and we have to!) for various reasons experience such things in most of the branches. The bank staff, in general, do not work. To make them work is a problem. What are we to do now? There's a ready answer from the executives who manage employees. They say that we must frame new sets of rules and punish violaters

severely. Such strict rules, they feel, should be implemented as quickly as possible.

But are we not used to such suggestions? Since the very inception of the system that we call 'administration', which has come down to us from the times of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya and Chanakya, if not earlier, laws and rules are being framed, strict punishments are being thought about for violations, and nothing is happening. Even with all the strict rules and severe punishments, problems exist.

What's the way out then? How is it possible to make bank people work? Before thinking of solutions, let's take a look at the basic issues the problem is concerned with. The three angles of the banking triangle are: (a) the bank employees; (b) the clients or customers; and (c) the service employees are expected to render to clients. There's something common between these three angles of the triangle. What is it? It is money! It's to earn money that employees come daily, are supposed to work, and to satisfy their customers. Here's the clue to solve the problem.

Money has traditionally been accepted as a means of exchange. This concept of exchange aims at a sense of 'give and take'. That means if something is given to somebody, something else is expected from him or her in exchange. But this is a wrong concept. There should be something higher. Money actually is the visible sign of a universal force. This force works on our practical life of the senses. It is a force of mutuality, the root of which lies in love. The supreme Being desires us to reach the realm of love which is the form through which He manifests Himself on this earth,

starting from the sense of mutuality. And money could be a symbol of divine mutuality; it is not merely a means of exchange.

We are in the habit of seeing things from the standpoint of our personal egos. The divine force of mutuality, being handled by the egoistic rationality, has become transformed into a sense of mere exchange—getting dissociated absolutely from love. Exchange has a natural proneness to get associated with the sense of ‘extent’. That means, how much received would be compatible with how much given. The rational and the so-called practical mind would act devising ways and means of increasing the quantum received, making it compatible with less amount of quantity given. The bank people think that the money they get as salary at the end of every month is matching with the nature and amount of work they perform within the infrastructure they are provided with. But it is not.

Love has the tremendous power of generating the sense of giving away everything one possesses to the person one loves. This renunciation is a tremendous force which removes the lower ego. The sense of love, if dissociated from the sense of ego, awakens mutuality in the heart. This leads to the arousal of the holistic idea of work they are performing. Instead of mere performance of duties, their work will become the expression of adoration.

Sri Ramakrishna has emphasized this idea of performing work as an offering to the Divine. He gave the world a new concept of *vijnana*, to see everything—from the mountain to the blade of grass—as God Himself. So all work should be done with the idea of adoration of the Divine.

Swami Vivekananda told his western ad-

mirers on 23 July 1894 in Thousand Island Park: ‘Do all as a sacrifice or offering to the Lord. Be in the world, but not of it, like the lotus leaf whose roots are in the mud but which remains always pure’ (*The Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 63). Again, he told them on another occasion: ‘Our best work is done, our greatest influence is exerted, when we are without thought of self. All great geniuses know this. Let us open ourselves to the one Actor, and let Him act, and do nothing ourselves’ (*Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 14).

What I mean is this: instead of endless rules and failures, it’s better to try a positive method of higher motivation. The whole concept then gets transformed. Instead of considering money as a means of exchange, it should be accepted as a manifestation of a divine force, coming directly from God, which should be used to set ourselves on the tract that leads towards the path of spirituality. Though this idea seems Utopian, I feel that with all the blows we are getting personally, nationally and internationally, many good employees will understand higher ideas now. So, instead of considering our work as drudgery, we shall work with devotion, and our work itself will become an adoration of the Divine. I am trying this method and, having come under the influence of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, I find my work most satisfying and energizing. I don’t find it to be any trouble at all to be of as much service to our clients as is in my capacity. We consider the workplace itself as a temple, and the work done there as the worship of the Lord because we look upon the customers as expressions of the Divine. □

We may all manage to maintain our bodies more or less satisfactorily and for longer or shorter intervals of time. Nevertheless, our bodies have to go; there is no permanence about them. Blessed are they whose bodies get destroyed in the service of others.

—Swami Vivekananda

Working as a Teacher

MANJU NANDI MAZUMDAR

Our readers are familiar with Smt Mazumdar, who has compiled questions and answers of Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj for us. Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar teaches Chemistry and some other subjects in a high school in Kolkata and, in company with some others, also runs a private institution, teaching tens of poor children free of charge. She being a devotee, her work becomes an adoration. Here are her experiences.

Professionally, I am a teacher. Education involves learning, and learning means the modification of behaviour. Our behaviour is a result of past experiences and actions, but it can be modified through learning, environmental influences, and the performance of good actions. The goal, however, is the attainment of perfection, as the very oft-quoted statement of Swami Vivekananda says: 'Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.'

The great educationist, Rousseau, writes in *Œmile: ou de l'éducation* that education should be natural and spontaneous because what corrupts the individual is society. He therefore suggested education in a natural environment. Rabindranath Tagore also gave importance to natural education. That nature helps learning is accepted everywhere these days. Children learn more about science from nature than from classroom discussions.

The second vital factor in the educational process is the teacher. Apart from nature, the teacher plays a vital role in educating the child in a proper manner. Where natural education is not feasible, the classroom is inevitable. The teacher's behaviour in the classroom is important and helps create an atmosphere which may be termed as 'classroom climate'. Classroom teaching requires a proper interaction between the students and the teacher. The teacher should be alive to the situation, loving in disposition, and genuinely interested in the development of his pupils. Working for

work's sake or, worse, for the sake of salary, is the bane of the modern educational system. There must be proper interaction with constant reciprocal feedbacks. As a teacher I keep this in mind always.

Teaching through programmed instruction is very effective. This is a relatively new technique of reading and writing. There are two main divisions of programmed instruction. The first, linear programming, arranges a topic into sequences and gives the student a chance at each step to think and propose the next step. It's so arranged that there's almost total success for the student, and this helps boost his confidence. Branching programming is the second type, which involves a roundabout way to arrive at a conclusion. Programmed instruction is effective in bringing out the best in children. Edgar Dale first proposed the cone to classify audiovisual aids according to their effectiveness. The traditional teacher depended mainly on verbal exposition and it is the least effective method. If teaching is effective with the help of non-projected aids, it's more effective with projected aids. But direct experience is the most effective method of learning.

I try to concentrate on how best the student can think and bring the best out of him or her. I believe in Swami Vivekananda's idea that the teacher is only an instrument in bringing out what's latent in the student. I also believe in Swamiji's other suggestions regarding the learning process. For instance, he said: 'We

must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 302). So with the completion of my syllabus, I try to concentrate on other areas of development of my students to the extent I can. With the attitude of the popular phrase, 'friend, philosopher and guide', in my mind, I try to solve their problems and also encourage them in their extracurricular activities. The students of classes 11 and 12, whom I teach, are in their delicate adolescent period. They are highly emotional. Basically, they are in a 'no-man's land', because they are neither children nor adults but are caught in the jigsaw of overlapping forces and expectations. At one moment they behave like little kids and immediately thereafter, they are rebellious for not being treated as adults. So they need careful handling. Keeping this in mind, I try to give due importance to their opinions. Infinite strength is hidden in everybody; I try to help them to motivate their strength and emotions in the right direction, help them to make their minds stable, constructive, idealistic, as well as practical. The last five or ten minutes of most of my classes are set aside to

narrating stories about Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi, Sister Nivedita, great scientists, educators, etc. The way their eyes glitter hearing those stories is a joy to watch. I try to inject novel ideas into them and ask the students to expand these ideas on their own. I get utmost satisfaction in bringing out their inner capabilities.

One batch goes and another comes. I try to serve them as best as I can, thinking that God has provided me with a rare opportunity of guiding growing minds. I always consider my little service as a service to the Almighty. In my own personal life I practise some spiritual disciplines as instructed by my guru, and this helps keep my mind above the evil forces of the world. I read Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature as well as other spiritual books and this helps me immensely. Such books keep on reminding me day after day that within each individual it's God alone that exists, and that in serving the human being, I am serving God. I sincerely believe that in my profession, I have been given a great opportunity and scope to serve a small group of students who are to become future citizens of the world. My profession has become a sadhana to me. □

Rabia's Love for God

Rabia asked a young man why he had tied a bandage on his head. He replied that he had a headache. 'How's your health, generally?' she asked. The young man replied that he is always healthy, and it was only after a year that he had this headache. Rabia then told him with tears in her eyes: 'When you were healthy, what emblem did you carry to show to the world the goodness of God? Today, only because you have a little headache, you are going about with a bandage to show to the inquisitive world that my Beloved Lord is harsh to you. Pray remove that bandage. Let not people ask you the reason and then accuse my Lord of unkindness.'